

ALMA: COMMUNITY, AND SHIRE TOWN OF WABAUNSEE COUNTY, KANSAS
ITS FIRST FIFTY YEARS, 1855-1905

by

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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to present an historical account of the first fifty years concerning the settlement of and developments in the community and town of Alma, Kansas. The writer proposes to show that the unique character of the town and its surrounding community in the Mill Creek valley stems partially from its old world background which is German, and from its situation in the midst of a remote rural section of Kansas. The development of the community and the town of Alma is presented in its social, spiritual, civic, and economic aspects.

The interest of the writer in the subject of this thesis developed from the fact that she has lived for ten years among the Alma people and has taught the children of a number of both the townspeople and those in two rural school districts. It is her desire to make a small contribution to the limited store of such "grass-roots" histories which have been done in the state of Kansas prior to the present time.

The principal sources of information upon which this subject is based were local and county records, the journals of the town council and the county commissioners, the records found in the offices of the county superintendent of schools, the probate judge, the register of deeds, the tax rolls, the census records of both county and state, newspaper accounts, a county history and several state histories, records and files on the subject of Alma and Wabaunsee County at the state historical society, and personal interviews with local persons coupled with the lucky find of two original manuscripts which have been of inestimable value.

INTRODUCTION: THE GEOGRAPHIC SETTING FOR THE ALMA COMMUNITY

If the term "grassroots" may be applied to the history of a local area it should be especially applicable to a history of Alma, Kansas, which is the County Seat or "Shire Town" of Wabaunsee County. Alma, a town of less than 1000 in population, is situated in the heart of the Bluestem pasture-lands which comprise 85 percent of the acreage of this strictly agricultural Kansas county. The highly nutritive bluestem grass fattens some 300,000 cattle each year in the upland pastures which cover the "Flint Hills" of Wabaunsee County. Along the narrow valley floor of winding Mill Creek and its many branches lie fertile croplands which were claimed in the early years of the settlement of this region. In the years from 1854 to 1856 when the first settlers were finding their way into the Mill Creek valley by following the tortuous trail which skirted the woodlands along the stream, it was said that a horse and rider on this trail would have been hidden from view by the tall grasses which covered the valley floor. The foot traveler who might have ventured along a high ridge trail would have found the bluestem grasses growing hip and waist high.

The townsite which was chosen in 1866 by a small group of enterprising Mill Creek settlers as the perfect location for "the Capital of Wabaunsee County,"¹ lies on a slightly elevated plain above the valley floor near the junction of the two main branches of Mill Creek which flow together at this point to form its main stem. Since Mill Creek has figured importantly in the settlement and early development of the Alma community and in the founding of

¹Supra., Chapter III, pp. 46-48.

the town of Alma it is well to note its diverse pathway from its rise in the southern and western regions of Wabaunsee County to its junction with the Kaw (Kansas) River in the northeastern edge of the county.²

Mill Creek, with its long feeder branches, drains more than two-thirds of Wabaunsee County. Upper Mill Creek is divided into two main branches which are known as South Branch and West Branch. In the extreme southwest corner of the county, near the town of Alta Vista, West Branch rises and pursues a northeasterly course of about 18 miles before its junction with South Branch at Alma. Feeder streams flowing into it from the northwest are Spring Creek and Loire Creek while Illinois Creek flows into it from the south. The headwaters of South Branch rise in the southern and eastern regions of Mill Creek Township, flowing down from the divide near Eskridge and Lake Wabaunsee. One of its upper branches was dammed in 1931 to create the beautiful 475-acre Lake Wabaunsee. Feeder streams for South Branch are East Branch and Nehring Branch. Mill Creek continues its meandering northeasterly course from Alma for a distance of more than 20 miles, draining the 30 square miles that formerly comprised the Pottawatomie Indian Reserve. It is fed from the northwest and north by Hendricks, Pretty, and Mulberry creeks while Kuenzeles, Snokomo, and Dry creeks flow in from the south. Near the northeastern corner of Wabaunsee County, Mill Creek turns sharply northward to flow a distance of about three miles to its union with the Kansas River.³

Wabaunsee County lies just to the south of the Kansas River which forms the whole of its northern boundary. It is in the fourth tier of Kansas

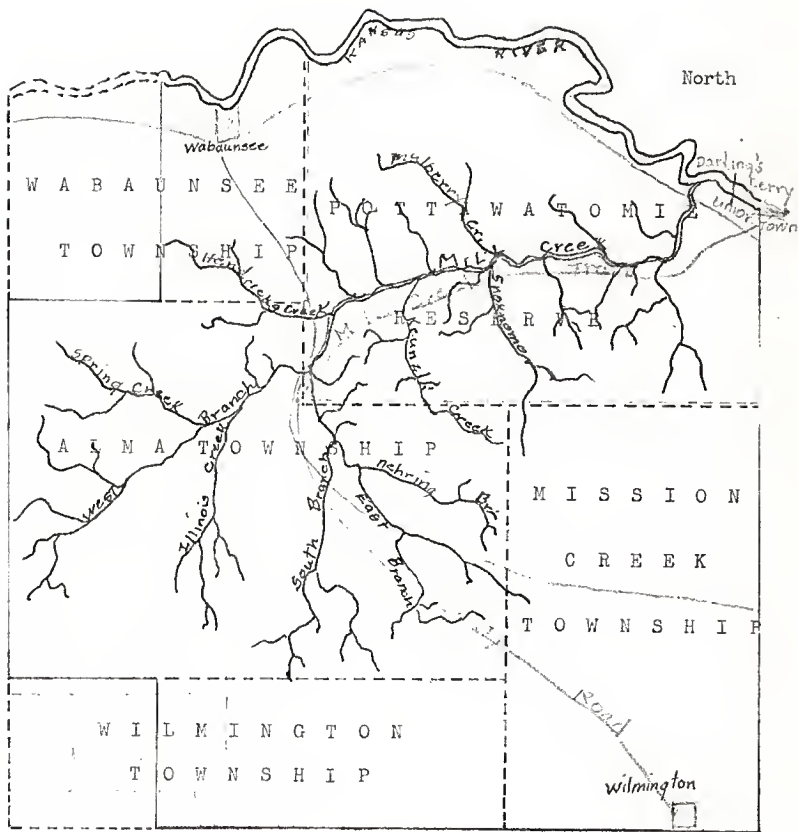
²Plate I, Map of Early Wabaunsee County, p. 4; note the course of Mill Creek and its branches.

³Ibid., p. 4; note extent of former Pottawatomie Reserve.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE I

This map shows early Wabauunsee County, with Alma Township shown as it was established prior to 1864. The dotted red lines enclose the Pottawatomie Reserve and the Kaw Reserve. The corners, which Wabauunsee County lost to neighboring counties in 1864 and 1871, respectively, are indicated by black dotted lines. Mill Creek and its two main tributaries, South Branch and West Branch, is emphasized, showing its extensive drainage of the county. Early trails and the first two county roads to be opened are shown as red and green lines.

PLATE I



Scale: $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles to 1 inch.

counties and is an intermediary county in climate and physical features between the eastern section of the state and the central plains region. This county misses some of the extremes of weather found farther to the west and does not enjoy the more favorable moisture conditions which are usually the pattern in the eastern regions of Kansas. In dry years, water supplies for the towns and farms become a serious problem yet no town in this county has seen its water supply fail completely. Wells rather than streams furnish water to Wabaunsee County's towns and farms. In wet years the bottom lands have been subjected to flash and sometimes severe floods. For the most part, however, Wabaunsee County farmers can depend on a reasonably good crop season. Since 1952, when this section of Kansas along with most of the states of the Midwest entered a cycle of less than adequate rainfall, a number of the Mill Creek valley farmers have installed irrigation equipment. Water is pumped from the streams adjoining their fields into a portable pipe-sprinkler system which assures heavy yields from such crops as alfalfa, corn, and sorghum.

Notwithstanding the minor drawbacks of climate and topography, the Mill Creek valley farms are choice and well-improved. The valley floor is narrow but its topsoil is rich and deep. Since only 15 percent of the acreage is suitable for croplands, the farmers of Wabaunsee County utilize their bottom lands to the utmost. The diversified farming practices of earlier years have given place to a concentration on feed and forage crops which are utilized in finishing for market thousands of beef cattle. At the turn of the century, the Mill Creek valley farmers could be seen at their county and state fairs proudly displaying prize swine, sheep, cattle, and poultry as well as numerous samples of grains, garden vegetables, and fruits from their orchards and vineyards. They grew Irish potatoes for both market and home use. Their

vineyards furnished table and wine-cellar. However, by 1907, there was a marked trend toward the production of beef cattle as the top farm product. The Bluestem that covers the myriad hills too "flinty" and steep to cultivate was found to have no peer in filling out the gaunt frame of the Texas steers which began to be shipped into the county by the thousands, each spring. The farmers began to supplement their income from limited valley acreages with rental fees from their more numerous acres in upland pastures. They also increased their own herds of beef cattle and took steps to improve the quality of their herds.

Dry years and depression years took their toll of the Mill Creek valley farmers, but most of them doggedly weathered the lean years to share in the prosperity which came to America's farmers following World War II. The trend toward the concentration of the pasturelands of Wabaunsee County into a few giant ranches, plus many which exceed a moderate acreage, has accelerated during the past two decades. There are four ranches in this county which contain from 10,000 to 18,000 acres each, while several more contain from 4000 to 8000 acres within the fences of a single owner. In 1954, there was a total of 68 farms which were larger than 1000 acres each, within Wabaunsee County.⁴

The "Flint Hills" which the state geologists have insisted contain no flint rock are flint, nevertheless, to Wabaunsee County residents. Anyone who has ever cut up a tire on the township roads of this county where natural rock mingles with a surfacing of sharp-edged creek-bed gravel, will stoutly defend the terminology of "flint." Limestone rock is the native stone which is found in great abundance everywhere in the county, as the many rods of

⁴Census of Agriculture For Wabaunsee County, 1954; U. S. Dept. of Commerce. A bulletin giving statistics on crops, livestock, and products.

stone fence still bounding valley fields and barnyards will testify. Along any of the winding Mill Creek valley roads are to be seen many houses, built before the turn of the century, of this creamy yellow native stone. They are as substantial as they are picturesque, some of them clinging to a hillside as if they were a natural outcropping of the native rock. Many of the farm buildings which cluster around the houses are also built of stone.

In the following five chapters of this study of a small but important Kansas town in the heart of a remote agricultural region, it is the writer's purpose to set forth the more important events which gave impetus to or may have retarded the developments during its first half century. The settlement of the Upper Mill Creek valley and the establishment of Alma Township with the events that were important in the lives of the settlers prior to the founding of the town of Alma will be considered in the first two chapters. Chapters III and IV tell the story of the founding of Alma and of its periods of accelerated growth, boom, bust, and recovery. Chapter V records the events concerned with the cultural and social life of the town.

Since the unique character of the Alma community seems partially traceable to its European background, for the most part German, an effort has been made to trace the origins of several of the prominent early settlers. A cross section of their "stories" is included in order to help in understanding the cultural background of Alma. Events, both on the European and on the American scene of the mid-nineteenth century which brought many German immigrants to American shores and subsequently to the Mill Creek valley are recounted. Biographies of some of Alma's "first settlers" are included in order to lend color and reality to the Alma story.

CHAPTER I. THE MILL CREEK SETTLEMENT, 1855-1859

The words, such as Oregon, California, Santa Fe, Bent's Fort, and other points were the general stock in conversation at Westport, Missouri, in the spring of 1855 ... but among the moving mass and amid the Babel of voices, the woods of Mill Creek were heard mentioned at intervals.¹

Political and economic pressures in the affairs of the United States had dictated the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, May 30, 1854. By this act the lands west of the states of Missouri and Iowa were opened to white settlement. Swarms of land-hungry settlers poured into the eastern regions of the Kansas Territory to seize eagerly upon the fertile lands of the erstwhile Indian Territory. Colonies from New England, Ohio, and other "Free-State" regions came to Kansas with the intent of winning the new territory as a Free State. Southern states, just as determinedly, sent scores of settlers to work for the winning of Kansas as a Slave State. Missouri contributed her full measure of participants for the coming struggle which would determine if Kansas were to be "Slave or Free."

In addition to the American settlers who sought new homes in the Kansas Territory, there came a hardy breed of foreign immigrant, seeking freedom and economic opportunity such as he had never known in his Old World homeland. The most numerous of these peoples were the Germans. They came to Kansas by the thousands during its first three decades of settlement. Many came into the Territory prior to 1860. A number of these industrious, thrifty people found their way into the upper Mill Creek valley to become the pioneer

¹Louis Palenske, "Reminiscences of the Mill Creek Settlements," The Alma Signal-Enterprise, Sept. 27, 1929. A son of the first white settler, Frederick Palenske, who brought his family to Mill Creek, Louis Palenske recounted many incidents of his childhood and of the early Alma community.

settlers of Alma Township, Wabaunsee County, Kansas.²

The prelude to the Mill Creek settlements properly began in Revolutionary Germany during the period, 1815-1848. The powerful political ideologies of nationalism and democracy which were sweeping all of Europe, as the heritage of the French Revolution, found many converts in the German states. Young men, especially among the students and professors at the universities, organized and began agitation for a united and free Fatherland. Many of these young liberals had participated in the war of liberation against the tyrant, Napoleon, and now, their agitation for liberation was against the tyrant rulers of their homeland. It was inevitable that the German rulers should become alarmed at the revolutionary activities for reform in government, and that a conservative reaction should set in. This was the era of Metternich when the Austrian Chancellor's conservative leadership, in behalf of maintaining the status quo of royal kingship, keyed the measures taken by the German and Austrian kings and princes to quell the agitation for reforms. Prussia was the strongest of the German states, having emerged from the campaigns against Napoleon, in control of most of the Rhineland and as the accepted leader of the north German provinces. Prussia, desiring to end the era of Austrian influence in and domination over the German Confederation of the southern provinces, began a program designed to extend her control over many German regions through the establishment of her customs union, the Zollverein. In the Germany that was just beginning to experience the early phases of the industrial revolution, this was a positive step toward German unity. It was,

²U.S. Census of 1860, State of Kansas, Vol. V. (Topeka: 1860), pp. 273-280. Of the 285 residents counted in Alma Township, Wabaunsee County, 161 adults are listed, 115 of these of German birth. Table 1, Appendix, pp. 123-126.

moreover, an important factor in winning a number of the German states to support the leadership of Prussia in preference to that of Austria.³

In spite of the repressive measures taken by the German and Austrian rulers, after the revolutionary activities of the 1830's, agitation for reforms in government continued. In February of 1848, a new revolutionary movement began in Paris, which spread across the face of Europe toppling many a monarch from his throne. It not only threatened the thrones of Austria and many German states, but it left the Metternich system in ruins. Metternich was forced to flee for his life but at the last moment the loyal actions of the royalist troops overcame the revolutionists, saving the thrones of Prussia and Austria. Reaction set in at once with swift and terrible reprisals against the leaders of the revolution and against their followers. Young men by the thousands fled the wrath of the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs. These disillusioned young liberals--Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians--took passage for America's shores, where, they had heard, lay political freedom and economic opportunity.⁴

The "Men of '48" did not all make their way to America during that ill-starred year for the hopes of German revolutionists. Many tarried awhile in France, Holland, or in some free port, attempting to earn enough money for passage or, perhaps, to make opportunity for their families to join them before embarking for America. However, most of them had emigrated by 1851 or 1852. They probably remained a few months with relatives or friends in an eastern state before beginning a westward migration which eventually led them

³J. Selwyn Schapiro, Modern and Contemporary European History (New York: 1946), pp. 103-108.

⁴Ibid., pp. 190; 198-199.

into the newly opened Kansas Territory in 1854 and 1855. Thus came the vanguard of the German immigrants into Kansas and into the Mill Creek valley. These were the young, single men, for the most part. German families began, early in 1856, to seek new homes in the Kansas Territory.

During the troubled years in Germany, between 1830 and 1870, over two million German emigrants left their Fatherland to find new homes in the United States.⁵ Oppressive political and military measures continued to increase in Prussia all during the 1860's as the "Blood and Iron" program of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck paved the way for Prussian domination over the German people. Once again, the young men began to leave Germany in order to escape military conscription or compliance with the stringent measures inaugurated by the "Iron Chancellor." In 1866, Prussia decisively defeated Austria in the so-called "Seven-Week's War." Austria's domination over the southern German Confederation was ended as was the power of the once mighty Hapsburgs. The many young Germans of the southern provinces, who had chosen to support the cause of Austria against Prussia, now found it expedient to bid goodbye to their homefolk and to set sail, posthaste, for "The Land of Opportunity." Prussia would now march inexorably toward her goal of German unity but there would be no democratic constitutional government for the German subjects of the Hohenzolleren Kaisers. Disappointed young German liberals, again, emigrated to the United States by the thousands.⁶

Not a few German immigrants left their homeland in hopes of bettering their economic lot in America. The bulk of these people were poor or

⁵Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People (New York: 1950; p. 284. Bailey's table of immigration shows 2,326,215 German immigrants.

⁶Schapiro, op. cit., pp. 231-242.

displaced persons who had suffered crop or other farm losses or otherwise found no sufficient means of livelihood open to them in crowded Germany.⁷ The law of primogeniture, which held in Germany as in most European countries, forced many of the younger sons of small merchants and farmers to seek their fortunes away from home. Industrial and commercial opportunities were meager in most cities as well as in the small towns, since Germany's industrial revolution was still in its early stages. Many of these younger sons, along with a host of displaced peasants and small merchants, ventured to America to seek out job or business opportunities or to claim cheap lands. Kansas, with its thousands of acres of cheap lands open to Pre-Emption by the claim seekers, beckoned insistently to the Germans.

Many German families probably came to Kansas and especially to the Mill Creek valley, in answer to an urgent invitation to join the son, brother, cousin, or uncle, who had written glowing reports of the fine 160-acre claim which he had chosen. "Come to Mill Creek, Kansas Territory, and choose a fine farm for yourself," he had doubtlessly written, minimizing or failing to mention any hardships or dangers encountered on the Kansas frontier.⁸ The Kansas Census of 1860, reveals that by that date the Germans had claimed the Mill Creek valley as their own. Alma Township, formed in 1859 and comprising the vast area drained by all the upper branches of Mill Creek, counted fully three-fourths of her residents as German, in 1860.⁹

The 1860 Kansas' census reveals some interesting facts other than establishing the predominance of those of German nationality in Alma Township. It

⁷Thomas A. Bailey, American Pageant (New York: 1956), p. 326.

⁸Palenske, op. cit., Enterprise, Sept. 27, 1929.

⁹Kansas Census, 1860, op. cit., pp. 273-274; Table 1, Appendix, pp. 123-124.

reveals that single men outnumbered the married men, 57 to 35. It also shows that there was a dearth of young women of marriageable status. Seven or eight girls of ages 18 to 20 years were counted and still fewer teenage girls who would reach the age of 18 within the next three years. Any young woman who had reached the age of 20 or 21 years could surely write a "Mrs." preceding her name.¹⁰ It would take the large influx of families into Alma Township during the 1870's before the supply of single young women could meet the demands of the farmers of the Mill Creek valley for wives to share with them the fortunes and also the hardships of homesteading.

It is not clearly established who was the first white settler to stake a claim in the Mill Creek valley. It is known that John P. Gleich "squatted" on Hendricks Creek, just inside of the Pottawatomie Reserve, sometime in 1853. In the fall of 1854, he is said to have gone south of the Reserve and to have pre-empted a 160-acre claim on the South Branch of Mill Creek.¹¹ It is generally agreed that two young Rhinelanders, Joseph and Peter Thoos, also chose claims on South Branch in the fall of 1854.¹² It is not recounted, however, through what agency or person the Thoos brothers first heard of Mill Creek nor how they found their way to South Branch. Perhaps, the brothers heard of this region from Gleich, who helped in the operation of Darling's Ferry, where the California Trail crossed the Kaw River at Union Town. It is likely that Gleich directed the Thooses to South Branch or even possible that he may have led them into this fertile valley. There was no sure trail to

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 273-278.

¹¹A. T. Andreas, A History of the State of Kansas (Chicago: 1883), pp. 988-989. Andreas says that he gathered much of his material in his chapter on Wabaunsee County from the accounts of the "early settlers."

¹²Ibid., p. 988; Matt Thomson, Early History of Wabaunsee County (Alma: 1901), pp. 316-317; Palenske, op. cit., and others.

guide the early Mill Creek venturer once he left a well-traveled Indian trail which led southwestward through the lower Mill Creek valley to the Old Indian Mill within the Reserve. Proceeding from this point toward the junction of Mill Creek with its two main tributaries, South Branch and West Branch, the traveler would have had to resort often to spade and axe in order to widen a too narrow trail or to blaze a new one. However the feat was accomplished, the Thoes brothers made their way over the tortuous pathway to the Mill Creek junction and continued upstream along South Branch for a few miles where they chose some of the choicest lands in the valley as their claims. They then returned to Westport to spend the winter.¹³

Early in the spring of 1855, Joseph and Peter Thoes returned to South Branch to begin the tedious process of clearing a few acres of cropland. It is thought that their brother-in-law, Edward Krapp, returned with them and chose a claim for himself near the Thoes claims. The three men are said to have constructed three log cabins, one on each claim, within the space of three weeks.¹⁴ These young immigrants must have worked with meager tools and have subsisted on a very limited table fare. If they were less than skillful nimrods upon coming to the woods of Mill Creek, necessity must have encouraged them in rapid improvement of their marksmanship. Game was of tempting variety and in bountiful supply on Mill Creek while the streams abounded with fish.¹⁵

In April, Joseph Thoes decided that he should make a trip back to Westport in order to procure much needed provisions. He hitched his two oxen

¹³Palenske, *op. cit.*, Enterprise, Sept. 27, 1929. Palenske recounts the tortures of traversing the early Mill Creek trails.

¹⁴Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

¹⁵Palenske, *op. cit.*, Enterprise, Sept. 28, 1929. The "Reminiscences" appears in three installments, Sept. 27-29.

to his wagon and set out on the first of the many trips that he, his brother, or some one of his neighbors in the Mill Creek settlement were to make for the purpose of bringing supplies to the isolated valley. It was a long and arduous journey, usually consuming from one to two weeks. This was a momentous trip for the future of the Mill Creek settlement. When Joseph Thoes returned, late in the month, he was accompanied by the 30 young men of the Circinnati Colony, whose purpose was to found the first town on Mill Creek.¹⁶

Westport, Missouri, in the spring of 1855, was a busy, bustling, outpost town located at the junction of the Missouri River with its tributary, the Kansas (Kaw) River. Here was the chief outfitting post for the settlers of western frontier lands. The noisy clang of blacksmith shops where oxen and mule teams were being shod and of wagons being made ready for the trail, filled the air. Throngs of people crowded the streets and shops as they waited for wagon trains to be readied for departure. Passengers disembarked from Missouri River steamers at the Landing and hurried to make further arrangements for western travel. Some had previously arranged to join wagon trains following the well known trails to destinations in the far west such as Oregon or California. Others arrived at Westport hoping to hear news of desirable areas for settlement in the newly opened Kansas and Nebraska Territories. Open to suggestion, they joined groups engaged in lively discussions as to the merits of this settlement or that. The most frequent question asked by the would-be settler was where could cheap and fertile farmlands be claimed. Although the well known western destinations retained their attraction for the most venturesome settler, near-at-hand lands in Kansas beckoned

¹⁶Palenske, *op. cit.*, Enterprise, Sept. 28, 1929.

to the practical man. Lands in the eastern sections of Kansas were being rapidly taken. Now, areas more than one hundred miles west of Kansas City were mentioned as having attracted a few settlers. Someone mentioned that there was a place called Mill Creek, about 120 miles west in Kansas, where, it was reported, there were fertile valley lands awaiting the settler.¹⁷

Groups of foreign immigrants were to be distinguished from American groups as they stood hesitantly to one side of the milling crowds of people in the streets of Westport. Usually understanding but little English, they hovered uncertainly near the groups of buzzing American settlers hoping to hear a few words which might guide them to the cheap, fair lands which they hoped to claim for their own. On that April day in 1855, while Joseph Thoes was waiting his turn at the Landing to pick up some provisions, his attention was drawn to a large group of young foreigners who seemed to be anxiously conversing in the language of his homeland. Thoes joined the group and making himself known, he began to ask questions. He learned that their leader, a young German by the name of Ernst Honeke (Hoheneck), was undecided as to a destination for his group. Thoes was told of the plans of the Cincinnati Colony, which had been formed in Ohio for the purpose of founding a town in Kansas. These 30 or so young men comprised the vanguard of the colony which proposed to send out a larger group, once the townsite had been chosen and preparations completed for settlement. Thoes must have seemed an answer to the prayers of these bewildered young Germans. He told them of the fine lands which could be claimed in the Mill Creek valley and reported that there were only a few settlers there. When Thoes suggested that on Mill Creek there

¹⁷Palenske, op. cit., Enterprise, Sept. 27, 1929.

were good sites for a town, the colony held a hurried conference. "The decision was unanimous to go to Mill Creek."¹⁸

Joseph Thoes took charge of the preparations for transporting the Cincinnati Colony to Mill Creek. He hired three mule-teams and wagons and he found two teams of oxen with wagons which were purchased by two members of the colony. Provisions were purchased, gear and passengers distributed among the six wagons and soon the party was bound for Mill Creek. The journey over that rugged trail must have been one that these young men would not be likely to forget. But hopes were high and perhaps their enthusiasm for the new venture at town building in the wilderness made up for any lack of experience in wielding ax or spade as the difficulties of making progress over the Mill Creek trail were encountered.

High hopes were not enough, however, to enable the Cincinnati Colony to weather the hardships and disappointments which attended its venture at founding a town on Mill Creek. Ernst Honeke and his company selected a site somewhat to the south of the present townsite of Alma, and laid out a prospective town which they called Humboldt City.¹⁹ Honeke surveyed the site into blocks and lots. Each member of the colony took several lots as his share of the "stock" in the town venture, hoping to sell them at a nice profit when the new colonists came on in the fall. It is assumed that most of these young men, also took claims near the townsite. Alas for high hopes and rosy dreams of profits to be gained through the sale of town lots in Humboldt City! No takers came. If any new members of the Cincinnati Colony came, they passed the town venture by and also the opportunity to purchase claims at speculative

¹⁸Ibid., Enterprise, Sept. 27, 1929.

¹⁹Thomson, op. cit., p. 317.

prices. They probably ventured farther west and south up the branches of Mill Creek to find their own claims. Many of the original members of the colony became discouraged with pioneering on Mill Creek and returned to Ohio. It is said that the winter of 1856 was the coldest and longest one in the memory of the settlers. Food became scarce and clothing and shelter were often inadequate. However, there were a few hardy men among the colonists, who remained on Mill Creek to have their names written on the roster of the earliest settlers in Alma Township. Among these were: Ernst Honeke, Frank Schmidt, John Copp, P. Schrauder, Christ. Schwanke, C. Metzger, Joseph Schutter, and a Mr. Willig.²⁰

The first white settler to bring his family with him when he chose a claim on Mill Creek was Frederick Palenske.²¹ In the spring of 1854, this young German gathered up his wife, baby, and a few possessions and took ship from Bremen for the port of New Orleans, Louisiana. A river steamer carried the family on up the Mississippi and as far as Gasconade County, Missouri, where they remained for a year with friends. The following spring, the Palenskies decided to try their luck at finding a good claim in the Kansas Territory. At Westport, Palenske purchased an ox-team, wagon, and provisions, and again loading up his family and their possessions, set out to find his way to Mill Creek. He had been told that there were cheap but rich lands for sale in that region. At Union Town, Palenske was directed to follow the Indian trail to the mill on the Reserve, near the present site of Maple Hill. At this point he received further directions to proceed over the Mill Creek

²⁰Palenske, *op. cit.*, *Enterprise*, Sept. 27, 1929.

²¹Louis Palenske, "Autobiography of L. Palenske," MSS. In the possession of Mrs. Louis Palenske, his widow, who is the daughter of Joseph Thoes.

trail some 20 miles upstream until he found the southwest corner of the Pottawatomie Reserve. From this corner he might strike out to the south or west or north in search of a suitable claim. A few years later, a young lad, Louis Palenske, listened raptly as his father and mother recounted the story of their trials and adventures on the Mill Creek trail and of the finding of and settling on their claim. In spite of the rugged pathway over the trail, the Palenske family survived its rigors without serious mishap and found themselves ready to strike out from the Reserve corner in search of their claim on the morning of May 13, 1855. They proceeded northward along the western border of the Reserve to a point about one mile from the corner and there selected the lands upon which Frederick Palenske and his wife spent the rest of their lives.²² Matt Thomson says that Palenske bought his claim from a solitary, very discouraged settler, who was found living in a tent on the claim. The man was glad to sell the claim and throw in the tent and a few tools and provisions for the sum of \$20.²³

A second child, August Palenske, was born to the Frederick Palenskies in the fall of 1855. This was the first white child to be born on Mill Creek. Louis, chronicler of his family's history and of the early days of the Alma settlement, was the third son of this family.²⁴ The three Palenske boys grew up on their father's claim adjoining the Pottawatomie Reserve with more playmates among the Indian children than among the white children. Louis states that he rarely saw a white child until he started to school in Alma when he was about nine years old.²⁵ He recounts how he and his brothers often visited

²²Palenske, "Autobiography," *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

²³Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

²⁴Palenske, *op. cit.*, "Reminiscences,"; "Autobiography."

²⁵Palenske, *op. cit.*, "Autobiography," p. 2.

on the Indian Reservation with their dusky playmates. At first, Frederick and his wife were afraid of the Pottawatomies but they grew to trust and to like them. Their house became a favorite stopping place for these Indians, who frequently traveled a well-worn trail which wound past the Palenske farm. The Indians soon fell into the habit of stopping to ask for a drink of water or to exchange an offering of wild fruit for a prized cooked dish prepared by Mrs. Palenske. There were Indian "scares" during the Civil War years, when for many nights most of the settlers slept out in their cornfields. There were rumors that the Kaws, whose reservation was in the wouthwest corner of Wabaunsee County, were on the warpath, but Louis reported, "those Indians never came." By and large, Louis Palenske thought that the white people of the early Alma community had more trouble among themselves than they ever had from the Indians.²⁶

Another interesting family which settled on a branch of Mill Creek in 1855, was that of John T. Mahan. He was a widower with a family of five children, the eldest being less than 14. Early in the spring of 1855, Mahan and his two brothers decided to leave their homes in western Pennsylvania and to migrate to Missouri or Kansas. They hired a flatboat, loaded their families and possessions aboard, and poled their way down the Ohio as far as Cairo, Illinois. From there, the brothers and their families traveled by steamer up the Missouri and Kansas rivers to LeCompton, Kansas. Here, the brothers parted company, John Mahan making connections with Joseph Thoes, who transported the family to Mill Creek. Mahan settled with his family, on the north side of Hendricks Creek, not knowing that he was inside the Reserve. Soon,

²⁶Ibid., pp. 3-4.

he was informed by an old Indian, that he would not be able to claim lands on that side of the creek. The old Indian directed Mahan to an area on the south side of Hendricks Creek, telling him that those lands might be claimed. Mahan, glad to follow the friendly advice of the old Indian, crossed the creek, chose a new claim, and within two weeks had constructed a new log house into which he moved his family of motherless children.²⁷

Near the Mahan cabin was a small Indian village whose inhabitants soon proved themselves good neighbors to the Mahan children. John Mahan often found it necessary to make a trip to Westport for provisions, leaving the older girls to look after the younger children. On one such trip, early in the spring of 1856, the father was delayed in returning home by swollen streams. When Mahan had not returned at the week's close, several of the Indian women went to the Mahan cabin to see how the children were faring. It was fortunate that they took with them some of their own small store of corn and smoked meat for they found the five children hungry and frightened. The girls had found only some frozen potatoes to prepare as food, during the last two days. The Mahan girls were glad to learn from their Indian friends, the arts of parching corn and of making hominy. From that day, the Mahans and their Indian neighbors were firm friends. When John Mahan opened a country store on his farm in 1857, he counted the Indians as his best customers, though they usually had to pay him with fruit, meat, and berries.²⁸

Edward (Ed.) Krapp was reputed to have been the most influential man in the Mill Creek valley with the Chiefs of the Pottawatomie Nation. Although

²⁷Interview with Mrs. Edgar Wilson, granddaughter of John T. Mahan. Her mother, Margaret Mahan Lyons told her many stories of her childhood.

²⁸Wilson interview.

he probably staked his claim as early as did the Thoes brothers, Krapp appears to have waited until early in 1857 to bring his family to live on his claim. It is not known when Ed. Krapp first met the Thoes family. Likely, he met them through mutual friends in Kansas City during the year of 1852. In November, 1853, Mary Thoes, sister of Peter and Joseph, became the bride of Ed. Krapp. She appears to have remained in Kansas City while Krapp engaged in a freighting business, carrying goods from Westport to Fort Riley, Kansas. On these long trips, Krapp became the respected friend of many of the Indians, as well as of the white settlers. His friendship for the Indians is credited with having averted a serious uprising among the Pottawatomies during the year of 1864. It was reported that the chiefs were "ready to go on the warpath." Krapp accompanied Ross, the Indian agent, to a meeting of the chiefs and was able to persuade them to return peacefully to their homes on the Reserve.²⁹ Ed. Krapp closed his freighting business sometime early in 1857 and took up the business of farming on his claim. He was prominent in the affairs of his community all his life and had the distinction of being one of the five "founding fathers" of the town of Alma.³⁰ Krapp engaged in many business ventures, there, after the town was founded. However, Ed. Krapp seems not to have been always on the best of terms with his Thoes brothers-in-law. The first civil suit recorded in Wabaunsee County, finds Peter Thoes suing Edward Krapp for triple damages, alleging that Krapp carried off a wagon load of gravel from the Thoes farm. Justice F. H. Hebrank awarded \$9.00 damages to the plaintiff. Joseph Thoes and Christ. Hankammer were chief witnesses.³¹

²⁹Thomson, op. cit., p. 249.

³⁰Supra., Chapter III, p. 45.

³¹Andreas, op. cit., p. 991. The suit was heard on July 10, 1860.

Other settlers on the branches of Mill Creek in 1855, were Henry Terrass, Christ. Hankammer, J. Antoine, R. Hendricks, and a Mr. Mauzenbrinck and his wife. Terrass is said to have been a "squatter" on lower Mill Creek prior to his staking a claim just south of the Reserve in 1855. The death of Terrass, early in 1857 was the first death to be recorded in Wabaunsee County, and the first marriage to be recorded was that of his widow, Catherine Terrass, to John P. Gleich on April 16, 1857.³² The home of the Terrass family, near the Indian Reserve, was another "way station" for the Indians at all seasons of the year.³³ Mauzenbrinck had planned to open the first country store on Mill Creek but while on a journey to Westport, in the spring of 1856, he had the misfortune to drown in the Missouri River. His widow remained on Mill Creek, marrying Herman Dirker sometime prior to 1859. The Dirkers figured in the early life of the Alma community, keeping the first boarding house in the newly founded town of Alma in 1866 and earlier, their house on West Branch was the voting place for Alma, West Precinct.³⁴ Little is recorded of the activities of Antoine except that he helped John P. Gleich in the construction of a log house on Christ. Hankammer's claim in 1855. This house was so well-made that it served the Hankammer family as their residence until it was torn down in 1890.³⁵ Hankammer built the first sawmill in the valley only to see it swept away by the "big flood of June, 1858." Soon, he had put up a new

³²Andreas, op. cit., p. 991; Thomson, op. cit., p. 13.

³³Interview with J. H. Terrass, grandson of Henry and Catherine Terrass. Grandmother Terrass, coming down in the early dawn to start her busy day, frequently stumbled over the forms of several sleeping Indians who had availed themselves of her fireside warmth on a cold or rainy night.

³⁴Thomson, op. cit., p. 317.

³⁵Ibid., p. 317; Alma Signal, April 19, 1890.

and better mill and was hard at work serving his neighbors with the first lumber to be furnished to the valley settlers. Hankammer figured prominently in community affairs all through his useful life.³⁶ Hendricks' chief claim to fame seems to have been that he settled on the creek north of the present town of Alma, giving that stream his name.³⁷

Several young Germans settled on Mill Creek in 1856 who were to greatly influence both the early and later development of the Alma community. Foremost among these early settlers were Henry Schmitz, Joseph Treu, William Drebing, and Gottlieb Zwanziger. Bertram Cline, J. Metzger, and Fred Steinmeyer also took claims south of Alma in 1856. Early in 1857, the first doctor came to Mill Creek. He was Dr. August Brasche, who found time in addition to his duties as a doctor to run his farm and take an active part in community and county affairs.³⁸ Many families had settled in the upper Mill Creek valley at the close of 1857. The next few years saw the development of a thriving German-American community.

The second attempt which was made to found a town on Mill Creek brought a well educated German settler who remained to become the foremost leader in the affairs of the Alma Community through its formative years and who also was a leader in county affairs for many years. Gottlieb Zwanziger, a native of Bavaria, had earned a degree as Topographical Engineer, in 1840, graduating with honors from Polytechnical Institute at Munich, Germany. An officer in the Prussian army for several years, he resigned his commission in 1849, "being disappointed at the reaction which took place after the Revolution of

³⁶Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 317.

³⁸Andreas, *op. cit.*, pp. 991-998; Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

1848."³⁹ Zwanziger married Theresa von Orff, the daughter of a well-to-do Bavarian family, in 1850, and soon thereafter, emigrated to America. He settled at St. Louis, Missouri, where he followed his profession for several years. In the late fall of 1856, a St. Louis town company, proposing to take advantage of the Pre-Emption law which permitted a 160-acre townsite to be claimed in behalf of an organized town company, chose Zwanziger to be its agent and surveyor. He was sent out to the Mill Creek valley to select a townsite. He selected a townsite for the St. Louis Town Company which lay a little to the north and west of the Mill Creek junction and just west of the Reserve. Although the St. Louis company failed to send any settlers to occupy the site which Zwanziger had selected, his choice of this particular site was to have historic consequences.

Since the St. Louis Town Company failed to make any improvements on its Mill Creek townsite or to send out any settlers, Gottlieb Zwanziger won the right to pre-empt the townsite for himself, in 1857. He chose 80 acres from the original 160-acre site and completed his claim by selecting another 80-acre tract adjoining the townsite claim on the south. This foresighted gentleman reserved a 40-acre tract, lying in the northeast corner of his claim, retaining the dream of one day seeing a town occupying "the choicest townsite to be found in the Mill Creek valley."⁴⁰ A second young German, Henry Schmitz, would agree in 1866, that here was the perfect townsite.⁴¹

The Mill Creek valley began to show many signs of progress by the spring of 1858. In 1857, country stores had been started by John T. Mahan on

³⁹Andreas, op. cit., p. 996.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 996.

⁴¹Supra., Chapter III, p. 44.

Hendricks Creek and by the Thoes brothers on South Branch. Chris. Spiecker opened a post office on his farm. Ernst Honeke and Ed. Griffenstein were doing a prosperous business at their still near the Reserve. Ed. Krapp continued the operation of his freighting line, bringing needed goods and provisions to the Mill Creek settlers as well as supplying Fort Riley.

Griffenstein also operated a freighter line. A new trail was opened to Mill Creek from the eastern section of the state which offered a more direct and less difficult route than had the old trail. New settlers came in increasing numbers all through 1857. In the spring of 1858, Zwanziger began the construction of the first grist mill in upper Mill Creek and Hankammer put up the first sawmill.⁴² The farmers added a room or two to their small houses where families were growing and placed rail fences around their fields and farmyards. For the most part, the early houses and barns had been built close by the streams for convenience to the water supply. The valley farmers had to learn the value of an upland location for their buildings through the severe lesson of a Mill Creek flood.

On the night of June 28, 1858, the Mill Creek valley suffered a cloud-burst and consequent flood which lived long in the memory of its residents. The waters rose so swiftly that many people found their houses surrounded before they realized that the flood had cut off their means of escape. Four houses were swept away, their occupants barely escaping with their lives by clinging to near-by trees. Fred Steinmeyer and his wife were met by an rushing well of water when they attempted an escape through the front door. They hastily knocked aside the clapboards of their roof and clambered to a

⁴²Andreas, op. cit., pp. 987-989.

precarious perch atop the building until the waters receded the next day. A neighbor by the name of Moetcher rode his horse into the angry current swirling about the cabin in an attempt to rescue the Steinmeyers and was swept downstream. Fortunately, this was the only life lost in the flood.⁴³ Many barns, much livestock, and most of the valley crops were lost in the flood of '58.⁴⁴ The farmers learned a costly but a timely lesson. They soon began the rebuilding of houses and farm buildings but placed them on well above the high-water mark of the flood waters. They learned, too, to break some of the prairie sod of the uplands so as not to depend entirely on their valley fields for all their crops. Zwanziger rebuilt his gristmill and added a sawmill attachment before the year came to a close.

Settlers continued their trek into the Mill Creek valley in increasing numbers all during the years preceding the Civil War. The best lands all up and down the upper branches of Mill Creek had been claimed by 1859. Although there was not to be a collective settlement in the Mill Creek valley for some years to come, the Alma community began to feel a unity of spirit and of purpose which became evident when its people began participation in the affairs of their newly organized county and township in 1859.

⁴³Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 163; Interview with Fred Steinmeyer, son of the settler who experienced the flood.

⁴⁴Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

CHAPTER II. THE EARLY ALMA TOWNSHIP, 1859-1873

Wabaunsee County was organized in March of 1859, by the Fourth Kansas Territorial Legislature, which established the new county in response to a petition presented by a group of enterprising settlers who were residents of Territorial Richardson County.¹ In 1855, Richardson County was roughly defined by the first Territorial Legislature to extend 24 miles westward from the southwest corner of Shawnee County and thence northward until its western boundary intersected the Kansas River. With the river as its northern boundary, this county's western boundary was 30 miles long while its eastern boundary was but 26 miles long. Richardson County, having few settlers in 1855, was attached to Shawnee County for judicial and revenue purposes. As such, it had no county officers and no records, nor did it send a representative to the Legislature.² The new county received a change in name, but it was established to encompass the same territory as had Richardson. Wabaunsee, the only organized village in the county, was designated the seat of government and justice.³ It seems probable that the citizens of this already famed Free State settlement on the south bank of the Kansas River may have suggested that the new county bear the same name as that of the newly appointed County Seat. The site upon which the Beecher Bible and Rifle Colony from New Haven, Connecticut, founded its town in 1856, bore the name, "Wabaunsee," after a famous Pottawatomie Indian chief. It seemed appropriate that the county, which included 30 square miles of the Pottawatomie Reserve within its borders should

¹Andreas, A History of Kansas, p. 992.

²Ibid., p. 992.

³Ibid., p. 992.

be named for Chief Wabaunsee.⁴ Significant, also, in the choice of the name was its meaning. "Wabaunsee," said to mean "Dawn of Day," signified the hope of these Free State settlers that better times were soon to come for all of Kansas. It was their hope that Kansas might soon enter "the dawn of a new day," as a Free State before another year had passed.⁵ It appeared, in the spring of 1859, that the bloody struggle which had been going on for more than three years on Kansas soil, was over with the victory won for the Free State cause. The last terrible raid and massacre by the Missouri "Border Ruffians" had occurred on May 19, 1858.⁶ Moreover, during that summer, the Congress of the United States had refused to accept the Pro-Slavery LeCompton Constitution in spite of the urging of President Buchanan that it be accepted. Its framers had been elected to the LeCompton Convention through the "ballot-stuffing" practices of the Border Ruffians as had the members of the Pro-Slavery Legislatures. When the people of the Kansas Territory were given the opportunity to make their wishes known through honest elections, they elected the Free State Legislatures which sat at Lawrence in 1858 and 1859. Moreover, they rejected the LeCompton Constitution which embodied slavery, by the overwhelming vote of 11,812 to 1,926.⁷ Now, in July of 1859, their delegates were to assemble at Wyandotte for the purpose of framing a state constitution which would reject slavery, forever, in Kansas. Under this constitution, it

⁴Plate I, Map of Early Wabaunsee County, p. 4. Note extent of Reserve.

⁵Kansas Annual Register (Topeka: 1864), p. 211. O. B. Lines, who served his town and the county in many capacities, furnished a short sketch of the county of Wabaunsee, but for the most part recounts the history of the Beecher Bible and Rifle Colony. He suggests the significance of "Dawn of Day."

⁶Noble L. Prentiss, A History of Kansas (Topeka: 1909), p. 117. The Marais des Cygnes Massacre occurred near Fort Scott, during which 25 Missourians shot five Free State settlers and seriously wounded five others.

⁷Ibid., pp. 110-111; 119.

was fervently hoped that Congress would admit Kansas to the Union as a Free State.⁸

Wabaunsee County held its first election for the purpose of electing its county officials on March 28, 1859.⁹ The Legislature had designated Wabaunsee, Wilmington, and Alma as the three voting precincts for this election and a member from each precinct was appointed by the Governor to serve on the Board of Canvassers. These officials were also to serve as the first Board of Supervisors (Commissioners) for Wabaunsee County. Meeting at Wabaunsee on April 2, to canvass the vote, were J. M. Hubbard of Wabaunsee, Henry Harvey of Wilmington, and Gottlieb Zwanziger of Alma. These men were prominent "first settlers" and leaders of their respective communities. Each man continued to serve many years in various township and county offices.¹⁰ When the vote was canvassed it was found that 111 votes had been cast for a total of 11 county officers.¹¹ The majority of these offices were filled by men from Wabaunsee. This town continued to dominate the county elections until it lost its leadership in county affairs through losing out in the county

⁸Ibid., pp. 122-123; 127-128. The Kansas people accepted the Wyandotte Constitution on Oct. 4, 1859, by a vote of 10,421 to 5,530. Although the House of Representatives voted its acceptance on April 11, 1860, it was not accepted in the Senate until after the withdrawal of the southern Senators on Jan. 21, 1861. Buchanan signed the measure which made Kansas the 34th state to enter the Union, on Jan. 29, 1861.

⁹Thomson, Early History of Wabaunsee County, p. 165. Thomson includes a listing of all the County and Township elections from 1859 through 1901 (pp. 165-169).

¹⁰Andreas, op. cit., pp. 992-996. J. M. Hubbard was Probate Judge for two terms and was a State Senator for two terms after his Civil War service. Henry Harvey and his two sons founded the Quaker settlement at Wilmington and all three served in county offices. Harveyville was named for Henry Harvey. Zwanziger served as County Commissioner for two years and as Surveyor for 10 years. He also served in many Alma Township offices.

¹¹Thomson, op. cit., p. 165.

seat elections of 1866.¹² From Alma Precinct, Zwanziger was elected Surveyor and Dr. August Brasche was elected Coroner. Brasche was returned as County Coroner for five successive terms for a total of 10 years. In addition, he served several terms as Township Trustee.

The first order of business which was transacted by the County Board of Supervisors at its first official meeting on April 20, 1859, was the establishment of four municipal townships in Wabaunsee County.¹³ Zwanziger, who as County Surveyor was to survey the new townships as well as most of the roads laid out in the county during its first six years, made the motion that each township be defined in specific fashion. His motion having carried, he then proceeded to the definition of the territory to be encompassed by each of the four townships.¹⁴

As established by the first County Board, Wabaunsee Township occupied all of the north portion of the county which lay west of the Pottawatomie Reserve. Alma Township occupied the central portion of the county which lay west of the Reserve and east of the County of Davis (now Geary County) and an area south of the Reserve which extended east to Range 12 and lay north of Town 14. Mission Creek Township consisted of the area south of the Reserve which extended eastward from Alma Township to Shawnee County. The Township of Wilmington encompassed the southern area of the county which occupied all of Town 14 and about half of Town 15. A small corner of this township was cut off at the southwest by the Kaw Reserve, until the Kaw Indians were removed

¹²Ibid., pp. 165-169. Names of Wabaunsee citizens predominate until 1867.

¹³Wabaunsee County Commissioners' Journal, A, p. 1. This is the first volume of the Commissioner's Minutes, including the years 1859-1872. It is in the County Clerk's office at the Court House, Alma, Kansas.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 3-4.

to new lands in 1870. As established in 1859, Alma Township was the largest in Wabaunsee County.¹⁵ In subsequent years, due to additions and subtractions of territory at the western boundary of the county by the Legislature and also due to new townships being formed from portions of the original townships, Alma Township gained in area briefly, only to lose nearly three-fourths of her original area by 1873.

Wabaunsee County gained in width from 24 miles to 30 miles in 1860, due to the addition of a six-mile strip along her western border. However, when Morris County was formed in 1864, there began a six-year dispute over a 72-square-mile block of land that resulted in a compromise, which divided the disputed area equally between the two counties. Thus Wabaunsee County lost her southwest corner to Morris County.¹⁶ The machinations of John Pinkerton resulted in the loss of Wabaunsee County's northwest corner in 1871. Allegedly representing the interests of the Fifth (Legislative) District, which was composed of Wabaunsee, Davis, and Dickinson counties, Pinkerton achieved the transfer of most of Zeandale Township to Riley County. There were loud cries of "Traitor!" from his constituents and from A. Sellers, editor of the Wabaunsee County Herald.¹⁷ Sellers sold his paper in 1871 and the following year he was elected to the Legislature where, in 1873, he succeeded in regaining a small portion of the lost corner for Wabaunsee County.¹⁸

Prior to the western boundary changes of the county, the County Board began a series of changes which were made in the areas of the various townships.

¹⁵Plate I, p. 4. Note extent of the early townships.

¹⁶Wabaunsee County Directory and History (Topeka: 1907), p. 9. Elizabeth N. Barr.

¹⁷Wabaunsee County Herald, March 9, 1871. This issue is the valedictory of the Herald as Sellers sadly bids adieu after roundly denouncing Pinkerton.

¹⁸Barr, op. cit., p. 9.

In 1864, although the Reserve lands were not to be opened to white settlement until 1869, those lands were divided into three portions and attached to the townships bordering the Reserve. Alma Township gained a large area on the east only to lose it through the formation of Newbury Township in 1870. The six-by-fifteen-mile strip which had been attached to Alma Township on the west in 1860, was retained only until the formation of Washington Township in 1873. In 1872 and in 1873, Mill Creek and Farmer Townships were formed from the southern two-thirds of Alma's territory. A final redefining of the townships in the northern half of Wabaunsee County between the years, 1875-1879, awarded a one-by-eight-mile strip to Alma Township on the north. By 1889, it was the smallest in area of the 13 townships which had been established in the county.¹⁹ However, Alma Township kept abreast of the population gains of the various townships and by 1900, it was the most populous township in Wabaunsee County.²⁰

One of the chief concerns of the County Commissioners prior to 1866, was the granting of petitions for "viewing" and "opening" new roads throughout the county.²¹ In 1860, a road was surveyed and opened which connected Wilmington, in the southwest corner of the county, to the County Seat in the northwest corner. Alma Township received a road which led from the northern part of the township to Wabaunsee and by 1866 it had been granted roads which connected each of the settler's farms with a county road. The county roads,

¹⁹Plate II, p. 35; Map of Wabaunsee County, 1856. Note size of Alma Township, in comparison with the others. Also, compare with Map I, p. 4.

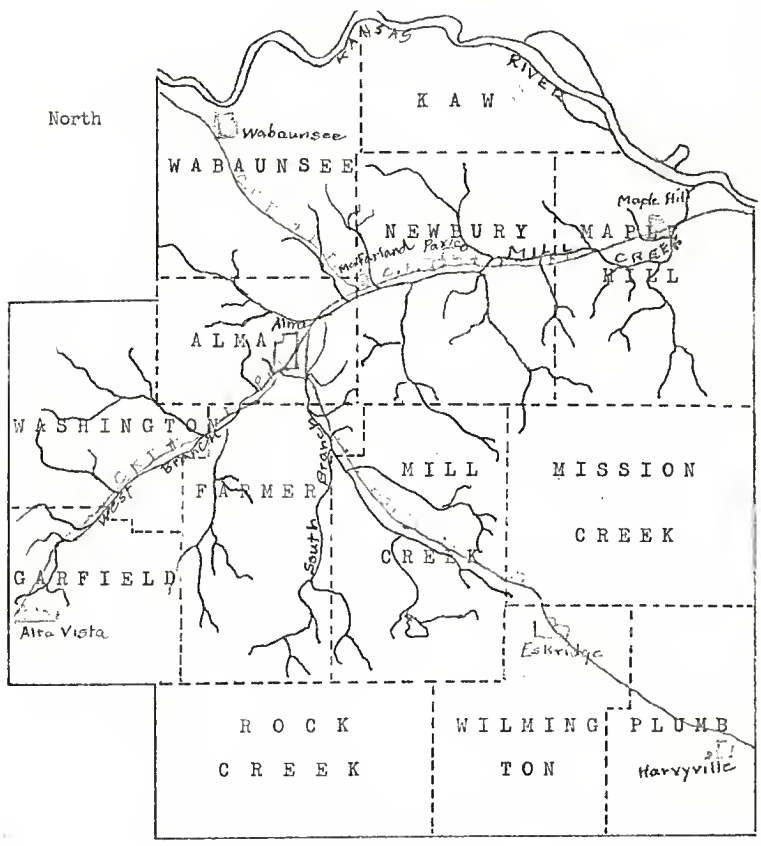
²⁰State Board of Agriculture Biennial Report, 1899-1900, p. 851.

²¹Commissioners' Journal A., pp. 4-260. Three men were appointed by the Board to ascertain and make report to the Board if the new road were laid out as specified by the township officials and the surveyor. If approved, the road, was then declared "open" and the expenses ordered paid by the township.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE II

This map shows present-day Wabaunsee County, with its thirteen townships, its seven towns and the two railroads on which these towns are situated. It is to be noted that Alma Township, in which the county seat of Alma is located, is now the smallest in area of any township in the county.

PLATE II



Scale: $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles to 1 inch.

in turn, connected with the well-traveled trails which led to such trade centers as Topeka, Kansas City, Junction City, and Manhattan. Travel remained difficult for many years in Wabaunsee County. Its roads were laid out to follow the "paths of least resistance," meandering as freely through the valleys as did the streams. They were narrow as well as crooked and in rainy seasons, "hub-deep" in mud. Rocks of all sizes beset the roadways, and for the most part they were allowed to remain. Sometimes a road climbed abruptly from the valley floor to follow an open trail across the "flinty" upland, especially if a difficult stream crossing might be avoided. Stream crossings were usually at "low water" fords, as in the early years few bridges spanned the streams. These few early bridges were built in a crude fashion and they rarely survived the first spring freshet. The settlers retained their ox-teams until well after the Civil War, in order to pull their heavy wagons over the often muddy and always rough roads, as well as for motive power in their fields.²²

The needs of the townships during their early years were simple as is evident from the statements of the first township trustees regarding tax levies for township and school expenses. Alma Township, in 1860, asked a levy of one mill for stated needs of "w100 for Township expense and \$100 for school expense."²³ These were the average amounts asked by the other townships, also, except that Wabaunsee asked \$200 for school expense. Few schools were operated in Wabaunsee County before 1863 but Wabaunsee operated two schools as early as 1859. Zeandale and Wilmington opened one school each in 1860 and Mission Creek opened a school in 1861. Although three districts

²²Interview with Mr. Fred Steinmeyer, son of an early settler. Born on South Branch in 1868, he recalls those early roads and fording the streams.

²³Commissioners' Journal A, p. 18.

had been organized in Alma Township by 1862, only one of them held school that year. By the close of 1863, 15 districts had been formed in the county and 13 held at least three months of school during the year.²⁴

A lively interest was displayed by the citizens of Alma Township in the early township and county elections. They turned out to vote in commendable numbers²⁵ and there appears to have been keen competition for the township offices of Trustee, Treasurer, Constable, and the two offices of Justice of the Peace. There were also three road overseers elected. In the first election held under the Wyandotte Constitution on December 9, 1859, five candidates competed for the offices of the two Justices and as many more for Constable.²⁶ Election to the few county offices which was gained by residents of Alma Township during the first decade in county affairs, appears to have been sought by the well-educated Germans who were acknowledged leaders in community affairs. Four of the six Germans who served in county offices prior to 1870, also served the Alma community for many years as leaders in political, school, and business affairs. It is stated in the biographies of Gottlieb Zwanziger, August Brasche, Henry Schmitz, and Joseph Treu, that they received the equivalent of college educations prior to their emigration from Germany to America.²⁷ To be added to the roll of the citizens of the early

²⁴Public School Records of Wabaunsee County, I, 1859-1887, p. 16. Located in the office of the County Superintendent of Public Instruction. For development of the schools of the Alma community, see Chapter IV.

²⁵Commissioners' Journal, A., pp. 5-6. Alma Township poled 54 votes of the County's 145 votes, a third of the total vote of four precincts.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 5, 14.

²⁷Andreas, op. cit., pp. 995-996; Thomson, op. cit., p. 299. In the biographies of Zwanziger, Treu, and Schmitz, Andreas states that their education was respectively, a graduate from Polytechnical Institute as a Civil Engineer, training for the priesthood, and some college training at Cologne. Thomson states that August Brasche was a graduate at Halverstadt Medical College, Prussia.

Alma Township who served their community for many years in numerous capacities are the names of Edward Krapp, Anton Schewe, Adolph Hankammer, Frederick Steinmeyer, John P. Gleich, John Copp, Joseph Thoes, John Spieker, Herman Dirker, William Horne, Franz Schmidt, William Drebing, Rudolph Arndt, John T. Mahan, John Schwanke, and August Meyer.²⁸

Although there is evidence that the citizens of Wabaunsee County continued their interest and their efforts in behalf of county and township affairs during the year of 1860,²⁹ their first concern was with the effort to "keep body and soul together," during the "year of the terrible drought."³⁰ From early summer of 1859, very little rain fell and from September, 1859, to October, 1860, not enough rain fell in any part of Kansas to "more than lay the dust."³¹ Louis Palenske expressed it as, "Not enough rain fell to fill one rain-barrel."³² With little moisture in the soil when planting began in the spring of 1860, garden and field crops came up sparingly, made little growth, and then withered by early summer. By fall, many wells had failed, small streams had dried up, and Mill Creek had dwindled to a mere trickle or stood in a few puddles in the deepest places. A little prairie hay was harvested from low-lying spots along the streams, but for the most part any livestock which survived until spring was kept alive through a meager diet of willow sprouts which were cut by the farmers.³³ A few potatoes, "the size of

²⁸Thomson, op. cit., pp. 165-169; 221-365. Thomson's election lists and biographies, as well as newspaper items and school records, give evidence of their services.

²⁹Commissioners' Journal A., pp. 13-38; Thomson, op. cit., pp. 7-9

³⁰Cazeteer and Directory of Kansas (Lawrence: 1870), p. 45.

³¹Ibid., p. 45. Rev. R. Cordley, in his "Historical Sketch," thought that the reports of "Starving Kansas" had retarded its population growth.

³²Palenske, "Reminiscences," Signal-Enterprise, Sept. 28, 1929.

³³interview with Fred Steinmeyer who remembers his father's drought stories.

marbles," were dug from patches on low ground and these were carefully hoarded as seed for spring planting.³⁴

The settlers along Mill Creek stoutly insisted that the drought was less severe in their cherished valley than anywhere else in Kansas, yet they faced the coming of winter with something less than confidence that they would not often go hungry before new crops could be produced. Of one thing they were certain--they knew that they would not be among the many discouraged settlers who were selling their claims for what little price they would bring or were abandoning them and leaving Kansas to "go back home." The Mill Creek settlers had not the means and few would have desired to go back to the homeland which was over 5,000 miles away. They had left Germany to seek a better life in America. In spite of the hardships which were the lot of pioneer farmers in Kansas, they hoped that their labors would soon be rewarded by ample returns. Their lot was cast with Kansas and they would "hang on."³⁵

The majority of the Kansas settlers did "hang on."³⁶ It was fortunate, however, that organized relief agencies were able to procure and to distribute many tons of provisions and needed items of clothing to the stricken settlements in Kansas before the courage and stamina of the settlers were tested to the breaking point. Many generous-hearted people, in the states east of the Mississippi, responded to the calls of churches and social agencies for the relief of "starving Kansas." Gifts of food, items of clothing, money, and seed grains were sent in large quantities to Kansas.³⁷ The

³⁴Palenske, "Reminiscences," *op. cit.*, Enterprise, Sept. 28, 1929.

³⁵*Ibid.*, Signal-Enterprise, Sept. 23, 1929.

³⁶Prentis, *op. cit.*, p. 131. Prentis estimates 30,000 settlers left. The census of 1860 had counted 107,000 persons as resident in Kansas.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 131. More than 8,000,000 pounds of provisions and clothing, \$85,000 in money and 2,500 bushels of seed wheat were sent into Kansas.

Governor divided the state into two "aid districts" and appointed two agents who received and saw to the distribution of the "aid goods" to needy families in every community. It seems certain that many families would have given up the struggle to remain on their Kansas claims until their fields and gardens might produce new crops the following summer, had they not received a few sacks of provisions marked "W. F. M. Army, Agent," or "S. C. Pomeroy, Agent," just when the prospects for the next few meals seemed extremely dismal.³⁸

While the business of daily living during that terrible year of privation was grim, there were some lighter moments in the lives of the settlers. It was said that up and down Mill Creek there appeared some costumes "marvelous to behold," which were got up from the contents of the "missionary barrels" sent by the well-meaning people of the East. A discarded broadcloth greatcoat known as an "Astor" or a "Vanderbilt" might be seen topping the much bepatched home-spun or jean-cloth trousers of the intrepid farmer. His wife's dress might be a handsome satin brocade, now worn in place of her old "best calico" which just would not hold together for another patch.³⁹ Time was when the Mill Creek farmer's wife had kept any silk dress that she had brought from her former home, carefully hung away from the sight of her neighbors, lest she be labeled as a "stuck-up city woman."⁴⁰ In 1860, necessity set the style of frontier dress.

Nature appeared anxious to make amends for her short-comings during the previous year and sent the Kansas settlers plentiful rainfall for the crop

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 131. Army was in charge of distributing the "aid goods" in southern Kansas while Pomeroy received the goods for the northern district.

³⁹Palenske, "Reminiscences," *Signal-Enterprise*, Sept. 28, 1929.

⁴⁰Interview with Mrs. Hal Weaver, whose grandmother, Theresa Zwanziger, had told of wearing out her silk dresses for everyday because there was no money with which to buy a bolt of calico cloth for new dresses.

season of 1861. They rejoiced in their bountiful harvests as they filled to overflowing their grain bins, pantries, and storage cellars. The Mill Creek farmers planted their carefully hoarded "marbles" in their potato patches and harvested many bushels of potatoes, most of which were as large as a "doubled fist."⁴¹

Hardly was there recovery from the drought year than material progress and population increases in Kansas received a further and longer period of retardation. On April 19, 1861, Fort Sumter was fired upon by the southern "Rebels" and the first call for volunteers to come to the defense of the Union was sent out by President Lincoln. Kansas sent two regiments to the front early in the summer of 1861 and six more followed before the year was over. In 1862, five additional regiments were enlisted and sent into the thick of the fighting.⁴² Wabaunsee County furnished 112 men, out of a probable 200 young men who were potential recruits. Twenty-seven young men from Wabaunsee, already trained in the famous militia company of the Prairie Guards which had seen action in the Wakarusa War of 1856, enlisted in Kansas Cavalry and Infantry regiments early in the war.⁴³ The young captain of Company B of the Kansas 2nd Cavalry, the first one to enlist from Wabaunsee County, was also its first war hero. E. C. D. Lines, son of the president of the Beecher Bible and Rifle Colony, C. B. Lines, was killed at the Battle of Wilson's Creek in Arkansas, on September 1, 1863.⁴⁴ Adolph Hankammer of Alma Township survived the battle of Wilson's Creek and the rest of the harrowing Civil War campaigns during which many of his regiment were cut down.

⁴¹Palenske, "Reminiscences," Enterprise, Sept. 28, 1929.

⁴²Kansas Gazetteer, op. cit., p. 42.

⁴³Wabaunsee County Directory, op. cit., p. 15.

⁴⁴Kansas Register (1864) op. cit., pp. 213-214.

Hankammer and Henry Grim received serious wounds while Sebastian Nehring, also of Alma, was killed during the terrible Indian massacre at Platte Bridge, Wyoming, in 1865. Near the close of the Civil War the 11th Kansas and remnants of other regiments, in which many Wabaunsee County men were enlisted, were sent to Wyoming for a campaign against the Sioux.⁴⁵ In 1864, Henry Schutter of Alma was killed at Cottonwood Holes by the Kiowas.⁴⁶ Other Alma men, who fought with a Kansas regiment, were W. T. Mahan, Moritz Kraus, Albert Dieball, Wm. Bandel, Sylvester Hiner, and D. Schwanke.⁴⁷

On October 2, 1864, all able bodied men in Kansas between the ages of 18 and 60 were ordered to attach themselves to some militia company being formed for the purposes of home guard duty at threatened points. Each man was to furnish his own equipment, including utensils and a blanket, and each detachment, its own rations. Several of the "older boys" from Alma Township joined two militia companies and got ready to "save Topeka" from a threatened raid by General Price. Ed. Krapp captained a company from East Branch with Joseph Treu and Wm. Drebing as Lieutenants, while Charles Weber and Wm. Horne led a company from West Branch. The men made their wills and departed for Topeka to guard the city while the regular militia troops from there were sent to join the Kansas troops gathering at Olathe. These troops were to be sent into Missouri for the purpose of stopping the advance of General Price and a large southern force which was threatening Kansas. The Alma detachments remained in Topeka for about two weeks, digging a trench around the town and erecting a stockade in the center. An erroneous report that Price had

⁴⁵Wabaunsee County Directory, p. 15.

⁴⁶Thomson, op. cit., p. 322.

⁴⁷Directory, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

entered Kansas, sacked Lawrence, and was marching toward Topcka, caused a defense line to form at the Shungamunga where the bridge had been "knocked out so that Price's men might drown in the mud."⁴⁸ When word came that Price had been defeated at the battles of the Big Blue, Westport, and Mine Creek, and that he had been driven back into southern Missouri with the Union troops in hot pursuit, the Alma militia companies were sent home.⁴⁹

In spite of the retarding effects of drought and war on progress in Kansas, during the period of 1860-1865, small population gains were shown for Kansas and for Wabaunsee County in the Census of 1865.⁵⁰ Alma Township accounted for one-third of the county's total gain of 58 persons. The county's total of 1,023 population in 1860 had increased to 1,081 in 1865, while the township's count was 285 in 1860 and 306 in 1865.⁵¹ On June 18, 1861, the voters of Alma Township petitioned for, and were granted, the division of their large township into two voting precincts. The County Board designated the house of Peter Thoes on South Branch as the voting place for Alma, East Precinct, and Herman Dierker's house on West Branch as the voting place for Alma, West Precinct.⁵² These "places" became popular gathering points for the residents of the two precincts on many occasions. When the elections came up in 1866 for selection of a new county seat, there were 27 votes cast in the first election in favor of "Peter Thoes' Place."⁵³

⁴⁸Thomson, op. cit., pp. 321-322.

⁴⁹Prentis, op. cit., pp. 160-163; Thomson, op. cit., p. 322. The Kansas Militia regiments engaged in three battles near Kansas City and Independence, Missouri, Oct. 20-23, 1864. On Oct. 25, they defeated a large Price force, capturing two generals and taking over 800 prisoners at Mine Creek, near Fort Scott, Kansas.

⁵⁰U.S. Census of 1865, Kansas, Vol. V, Wabaunsee County, pp. 317-324.

⁵¹Census, 1860, op. cit., pp. 273-280; Census, 1865, op. cit., p. 317.

⁵²Commissioners' Journal A., p. 49.

⁵³Thomson, op. cit., p. 11.

As has been pointed out, political, cultural, and material affairs continued to receive the attention of the Wabaunsee County voters and of their elected officials throughout the war years. In spite of the interest in the opening of new roads, the formation of school districts, and in the establishment of additional townships and voting precincts, there was noticeable frugality displayed by the township trustees in asking tax levies for operating expenses. This was dictated, no doubt, by the stringency of the times on the early Kansas frontier.⁵⁴

In retrospect, the frugality which was displayed by the County Commissioners and the voters with reference to at least one matter which came to their attention at the close of this period, appears to have definitely retarded material progress, in Wabaunsee County, for a period of ten years or more. The County Board, and subsequently the voters, took a dim view of two propositions which were presented in 1865, on behalf of voting bonds for a grant-in-aid to the struggling Santa Fe Railroad as it built its main line westward across Kansas. The first petition asked an election for the purpose of voting bonds, in the amount of \$100,000 to aid the Santa Fe and thus span Wabaunsee County with the main line of the railroad. The Commissioners denied the petition.⁵⁵ On February 24, 1866, the proposition of a \$50,000 bond issue to aid the Santa Fe was placed before the voters of the county and was rejected by a vote of 127 to 49.⁵⁶ The counties of Osage and Lyon voted aid to the Santa Fe and thus gained the main line of an important railroad, while

⁵⁴Thomson, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9. Thomson states that the amount spent by the County, in 1860, was \$1,875.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 97.

Wabaunsee County was by-passed by all railroad builders until 1880.⁵⁷ Matt Thomson dourly observed that enthusiasm for the promotion of railroad building through Wabaunsee County was worked up by the voters too late to get them any bargains for the bonds which they belatedly voted. "After years of long and weary waiting, we voted bonds in almost three times the original asking price for a main line, for which we received but a feeder line."⁵⁸

Although Wabaunsee County may have shared to a lesser degree in the boom times which came to Kansas during the first two decades following the Civil War, than did the counties which supported the earliest railroad building projects, most of her citizens shared somewhat less in the "bust" which followed. The German farmers, of the Mill Creek valley, joined in the expansionist activities of the boom period but caution prevailed in the buying of more land, new machinery, and in making extensive farm improvements. It is notable that many of the names of the German farmers, which appear on the County tax rolls of 1875, are still to be found as tax-payers on the same lands in 1895.⁵⁹ Moreover, the names of many of these farmers' sons also appear on the tax rolls of Wabaunsee County for the year, 1895, and in 1900.⁶⁰

In the following chapter, the events will be related that centered around the founding and early development of the town at the Mill Creek Junction, which came into being with the prime objective of becoming the "Capital of Wabaunsee County."

⁵⁷Supra., Chapter IV, pp. 69-75. Railroad building is discussed in its relation to the boom period of Wabaunsee County and of the Alma community.

⁵⁸Thomson, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

⁵⁹Wabaunsee County Tax Records, 1875, pp. 1-11; 1895, pp. 1-23.

⁶⁰Ibid., 1895, pp. 1-23; 1900, pp. 1-28.

CHAPTER III. ALMA, THE SHIRE TOWN OF WABAUNSEE COUNTY, 1866-1880

As Uncle Henry gazed with rapture on the lovely panorama of the Mill Creek valley spread out before his eyes he said to himself, "What an ideal place for the Capital of Wabaunsee County! ... and there at the junction of Mill Creek the Capital shall be."¹

In 1857, Gottlieb Zwanziger had pre-empted the town site claim of the St. Louis company which had sent him to Mill Creek to choose and lay out a townsite claim but which had failed to send any settlers to carry out the project of founding a town.² It is recalled that he had reserved a 40-acre tract in the northeast corner of his claim, retaining the dream that he would, one day, see a town founded upon his chosen site. It is not recorded that Zwanziger shared his dream of founding a town on the site which lay alongside the Pottawatomie Reserve and slightly to the northwest of the Mill Creek junction. However, it seems a reasonable assumption, in the light of subsequent events, that he did share his dream with some one or more persons and that one of those persons was Henry Schmitz. A settler of 1856, Schmitz early took a leading role in community and county affairs.

"Uncle Henry Schmitz," as his many friends affectionately called him, is credited with the "discovery" of the perfect place for a townsite on Mill Creek and with the idea that there should be founded a town with the primary aim of becoming the "Capital" or County Seat of Wabaunsee County.³ However,

¹S. H. Fairfield, "Henry Schmitz' Capital of Wabaunsee County," Alma Enterprise, Oct. 13, 1911. The Enterprise published the address given by Fairfield before the Wabaunsee County Historical Society on Oct. 5, 1911. Twice owner and editor of an Alma newspaper and for 50 years an influential citizen of Alma, Fairfield is the chief source of early writings concerning the founding of Alma and of early developments in both town and county affairs. An error in his early dates will be noted, subsequently.

²Chapter II, pp. 24-25.

³Fairfield, op. cit., Enterprise, Oct. 13, 1911.

it is the opinion of the writer that Zwanziger, who had held his townsite in reserve for nine years, must have pointed out its advantages to Henry Schmitz and others prior to Schmitz' so-called "discovery" in 1865.

By the fall of 1865 many of the Mill Creek settlers and most of the settlers dwelling in the southern and eastern regions of Wabaunsee County felt that a site for a new and permanent location of the county seat should be chosen by the voters. Wabaunsee, on the extreme northern edge of the county, had begun to be considered an inconvenient location for the county seat of such a large county. As early as 1863, some of the residents of Wabaunsee County had desired a change in the location of the seat of government and had presented a petition to that effect. Since there was an insufficiency of signatures the County Board of Commissioners had denied the petition.⁴ It is not recorded from what sections of the county the petitioners came, nor if they continued their efforts in behalf of a new location for the county seat in the interim of two and one-half years before the second petition was presented.

Henry Schmitz is said to have discovered his "ideal place for the Capital" as he was roaming the hills east of the Mill Creek junction one fine fall day in 1865, and to have "descended into the valley to stir up the settlers along Mill Creek" in support of his campaign to permanently locate the county seat on the site which he had selected.⁵ In any case, a stirring up of the residents in many sections of Wabaunsee County to petition for an election to permanently locate the county seat took place prior to 1866.⁶

⁴Wabaunsee County Commissioners' Record, A, p. 114. The petition was presented and refused on July 5, 1863.

⁵Fairfield, *op. cit.*, *Enterprise*, Oct. 13, 1911.

⁶*Ibid.*, *Enterprise*, Oct. 13, 1911.

One month after the Wabaunsee County Commissioners honored a petition praying an election for the purpose of permanently locating the county seat and three weeks prior to the holding of that election on February 20, 1866, Henry Schmitz and four other enterprising citizens of Alma Township took the initial step toward founding the town on Mill Creek which they hoped would be selected as the county seat. On February 1, 1866, an "Article of Association" was signed by Henry Schmitz, Joseph Treu, John P. Gleich, Augustus Brasche, and Edward Krapp, in which it was stated that the signatories were forming a town company "to be called, known, and designated by the name, style, and title of 'The Alma Town Association.'"⁷ The Article further stated that it was the purpose of the Association to lay out and found a town on the site selected "which shall be known and called by the name of Alma."⁸ The description set forth in that document of the town site that "shall be located and laid out upon the North East Quarter of the Northwest Quarter ($\frac{1}{4}$) of Section Fifteen (15) in Town Twelve (12) Range Ten (10) of Alma Township ... and being forty (40) acres of land" places it exactly as the site which had been held in reserve by Gottlieb Zwanziger since 1857.⁹ The Article of Association divided the property described into 80 shares of equal parts and placed the value of its capital stock at \$200, that sum "being the value of said land." The document further stated that it was the object and design of the town company thus formed to divide its site into blocks and lots and to "make improvements in and upon said town site and to bargain,

⁷Charter of Alma Town Association, Filed: April 11, 1866; Office of the Secretary of the State of Kansas. A photostat of the original charter was sent to the writer by Paul R. Shanahan, Sec. of State, on March 22, 1956.

⁸Ibid., p. 1.

⁹Ibid., p. 2; description of town site verified by Irene Steimel, Register of Deeds, as being the Zwanziger land.

sell, and convey lots and property in said townsite and to perform all other acts and things in and about the settlement, management, and control of such town property ... as may be allowed and authorized by law."¹⁰ On February 10, 1866, the Article of Association was certified by Justice J. M. Bisby of Wabaunsee Township and then it was presented to the Clerk of the Court, Sam'l R. Weed, upon whose certification the document became the Charter of the Alma Town Association. The Charter was filed in the office of the Secretary of the State of Kansas on April 11, 1866.¹¹ Thus the founding of the town of Alma, Kansas, took place.

In the meantime, two elections had been held for the purpose of selecting a permanent location for the county seat of Wabaunsee County and three more were to be called before the issue was determined once and for all. The petition, which had been presented to the County Board of Commissioners on January 1, 1866, carried an imposing total of 133 signatures, more than enough to satisfy the requirement of the law that two-thirds of the voters of a county must sign such a petition.¹² The election on February 20, 1866, failed to determine the location of the county seat since Alma's majority of 110 votes out of 218 cast lacked two votes of reaching the necessary three-fifths figure of 112.¹³ The results of the second county seat election, March 6, 1866, gave Alma a clear majority, the vote being 137 for Alma to 112 for Wabaunsee.¹⁴ Alma was not to gain the county seat, however, without another contest. In the first place, delay in removal to the new county seat was

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 1-2

¹¹Ibid., Title page attached to photostat of the charter; pp. 3,4,5.

¹²Commissioners' Record, D, p. 208.

¹³Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 215.

brought about through a resolution of the Commissioners to delay removal from Wabaunsee until May 1, in order that the district court's April session might be held there rather than in Alma where there were yet to be erected any buildings.¹⁵ The date which had been set for removing the county seat to Alma came yet no steps were taken to effect the removal. It appears that the disgruntled citizens of Wabaunsee Township were claiming that the March election was held without sufficient notice being given prior to the election and that it should be declared illegal and a new election ordered. A third petition was got up and carried throughout the county during the summer of 1866.¹⁶ When it was placed before the County Board on September 30, it was notable that few voters in the county had failed to sign it. There were 213 signatures, 49 of which were from Alma Township.¹⁷ Everyone was tired of the county seat issue and wished to see it speedily determined. Wabaunsee's valiant effort to retain the county seat failed to receive support from the majority of the voters. On November 22, 1866, they gave Alma a conclusive majority of 142 votes to 114 votes for Wabaunsee.¹⁸ Alma had won two elections and was for the second time declared to be the legal county seat of Wabaunsee County.

Although the county court ordered that the removal of the county seat to Alma should take place within the twenty-day time limit prescribed by law, the county officials at Wabaunsee appear to have dallied over the move several days beyond the limit. No records exist which state the exact day upon which the county officers loaded themselves, their records, and a few

¹⁵Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁶Thomson, op. cit., p. 74.

¹⁷Commissioners' Record, D. p. 244.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 251.

furnishings into two wagons and accomplished the long delayed removal to Alma. S. H. Fairfield told the story of the coming of the county seat to Alma in his address before the Wabaunsee County Historical Society in 1911, looking back over a vista of 40 years in a nostalgic mood:

Late in December of 1867 (1866)¹⁹ some ten or twelve people gathered at the Court House on the day set for the County Seat to arrive and eagerly watched the trail coming over the hill from the north. Just as the sun was sinking, two wagons were seen descending the hill. In the first wagon was the little safe ... which contained all the money and books possessed by the county except the Probate Judge's records. In the second wagon rode the county officers. There was S. R. Weed, treasurer, S. R. Weed, Register of Deeds, and S. R. Weed, District Clerk and County Surveyor, and S. H. Fairfield, County Clerk. Accompanying us were a few chairs, a couple of tables, and our blankets. We were cordially welcomed by the citizens of the new capital and were assisted by them in unloading the contents of the two wagons and in placing them in the 14 feet by 16 feet room that would be our new office.

We hitched our horses to the wagons and repaired to Mother Dierker's place for supper. She did her best. It was a sumptuous¹ one. Forty years have elapsed but we have not forgotten the meal we ate on that cold December night in the new county seat. After supper, we spread our blankets on the floor of our new office and slept as sweetly and as soundly as if on a bed of roses.²⁰

Thus came the county seat to Alma and two new citizens to take up their abode who were soon to take leading roles in the affairs of the new town.

The Alma Town Association had prepared for the coming of the county seat to their newly laid out town by rather hastily seeing to the construction of a two-story frame building (the Kaufman building) which was to be used to house the county offices and the court. The upper story was the court room

¹⁹Here appears Fairfield's error in placing early dates which has been repeated in several other accounts where he was the chief source of information. The writer has verified the founding dates of Alma, the dates of the county seat elections, and the date on which the County Commissioners first met in session at Alma. The minutes for the session held on Jan. 7, 1867, are headed, "Alma, Kansas," as are all subsequent minutes. (D, p. 253.)

²⁰Fairfield, op. cit., Enterprise, October 13, 1911.

and the building soon was called the Court House. On the lower floor were two rooms, the one at the rear for occupation by the county officers and the front room, facing Missouri Street, in which the Schmitz and Meyer General Store would soon open for business. The only other building on the Alma town-site prior to 1867 was the small boarding house which was called "Mother Dirker's place."²¹

During the first two years of the existence of "Alma, the shire town,"²² few settlers were attracted. It seems to have existed only as a small trading center for the Mill Creek settlers and to provide lodgings, meals, and a measure of liquid refreshment for the county officials and for those persons who journeyed to the county seat to transact official business or to trade. A picture of Alma which was taken by a traveling photographer late in 1868 or early in 1869,²³ shows two dwelling houses, the two-story Kaufman building (Court House), the new Schmitz and Meyer store, the Winkler Hotel, a small shed-like building which was the blacksmith, wagon, and harness shop of F. C. Simon, and two or three barns or sheds about which are clustered a few smaller out-buildings. Rail fences are much in evidence, most of them white-washed to match the business buildings. It is stated under the picture that "the Wiedeman building is obscured by the hotel," but this building is unidentified as to character.²⁴

²¹Ibid., Oct. 13, 1911; Palenske, "Reminiscences," op. cit., and others.

²²Andreas, A History of Kansas, P. 993. "Shire town," is used to denote Alma as the county seat. Some of the early settlers also used the term.

²³Thomson, op. cit., p. 5 of picture section 13; J. E. Kirkpatrick, A History of the Congregational Church, Alma, Kansas, 1900, p. 2. Thomson captions the view of Alma as "Alma in 1868." Kirkpatrick, whose material was obviously obtained from Fairfield, dates the picture as 1869. His description is used above to identify the buildings in the picture.

²⁴Kirkpatrick, op. cit., p. 2

John Winkler, a new immigrant from Germany, was the first settler to bring his family to dwell in Alma. Winkler arrived at the home of his cousin, Joseph Treu, in the fall of 1866, having come over from Germany to see for himself the wonders of the Mill Creek valley and to investigate the prospects for a business venture in the new town. He sent for his family to join him in the spring of 1867, having decided to open a hotel in Alma. In April, Winkler set out to meet his wife, Lena, and their two children, at some point in the East, only to learn, to his dismay, that Lena had contracted smallpox and was quarantined in New York harbor on Blackwell's Island. He eventually was able to make contact with his family and on May 24, 1867, the Winkler family arrived in Alma to take up residence in the first dwelling house that was built on the townsite. Winkler then began construction of the two-story building which was opened in the fall of 1867 as the Winkler Hotel. Lena Winkler's first year in Alma must have been a very lonely one as there was no other white woman dwelling near enough to become friend and neighbor. In the spring of 1868, the third child was born to John and Lena Winkler, he being the first child to be born on the Alma townsite. Winkler operated his hotel for nearly two years, selling out to Ed. Krapp, in the spring of 1870. He then departed with his family for the newly opened lands in the Reserve where he took up a claim near Maple Hill. However, John Winkler was to return to Alma to build a new and larger hotel in 1874, which he would operate for many years. During his first sojourn, young Winkler became one of the new town's leaders in civic and business affairs.²⁵

²⁵"Autobiography of John Winkler," 1929, MSS, pp. 1-4. In the possession of Norman Winkler, grandson of John Winkler.

Under the charter granted the Alma Town Association, the town company took charge of several business developments in the town but it did not have authority to grant licenses for the operation of businesses of any character nor did it have other civic authority. Such authority was vested in the County Board of Commissioners. At the first meeting of the Commissioners in Alma, January 7, 1867, petitions were granted for two new shops to open for business in Alma. Ed. Krapp was granted a license to open a grocery store and Schmitz and Meyer were granted a license to keep a dram shop, the fees for each license being set at \$50.²⁶ But in the interim between the January and April sessions, two of the members of the County Board appear to have had a change of heart on the matter of licensing dram shops. All further petitions for licensing such shops in Alma were firmly denied, the vote usually showing two negative and one affirmative on the matter. It is hardly surprising that the affirmative vote could be identified as coming from Henry Schmitz, commissioner from the first district of which Alma Township made up the major portion.²⁷ The contest between the adamant County Board and the thirsty "Dutch" residents of Alma Township, came to a boil in the spring of 1868. When it was time for the renewal of the license for the Schmitz and Meyer Dram Shop, a petition weighted with 134 signatures which prayed the granting of a license to Schmitz and Meyer "to keep a Dram Shop in Alma" was brought before the Commissioners on April 7, 1868, and promptly tabled until the April 14th meeting.²⁸ This contrary action by the county "fathers" appears to have "pushed the fledgling from the nest." The village of Alma

²⁶Commissioners' Record, D. p. 253.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 268, 303, 309, 336.

²⁸Ibid., p. 303.

asked to be incorporated as a town that it might govern its own affairs.²⁹

Whatever the immediate impetus, 13 inhabitants of the village of Alma placed their signatures on a petition which asked incorporation as a town, on April 13, 1868. The petition was at once carried to Judge G. G. Hall of the Probate Court who promptly granted the prayer of the petitioners, entering into his records an article over his signature, which was entitled, "Declaration of the Incorporation of Alma." His Honor appointed five men to serve as the first board of Town Trustees who were directed "to hold office as such Trustees until their successors are duly elected and qualified."³⁰ The first town trustees who were thus appointed were John W. Winkler, Herman Dirker, Henry Schmitz, August Meyer, and Sam'l R. Weed. Weed was elected as chairman and also acted as police judge, while H. H. Whittemore was appointed as attorney for the "council."³¹

The business of becoming an incorporated town having been satisfactorily concluded, the town of Alma took stock of its prospects and set out to attract settlers with families and men who would invest in property and in business ventures there. For the first year or so after its incorporation, Alma is reported to have run its civic and business affairs in the free and easy manner of the western frontier. Its citizens "ate and drank and bought and sold and did as they pleased with nobody to molest or curb them ... Sunday was like a holiday with everything wide open..." Their Indian neighbors are said to have often joined in these "holiday" good times and to have spent their

²⁹Andreas, op. cit., p. 993.

³⁰Probate Judge's Record, Vol. I, pp. 154-155; original petition on file. Also see Appendix, p. 123 for copy of the petition and the charter.

³¹Thomson, op. cit., pp. 322-323.

Government land checks freely for the white man's "firewater."³² Such an atmosphere would not have induced respectable family men to settle in Alma, but business prospects by the spring of 1869 began to look so promising that families began to come in. Another attraction was that a new schoolhouse was erected in 1868 which was a considerable improvement over holding school "in the courtroom when court was not in session."³³ Schmitz and Meyer, dram shop keepers notwithstanding, were interested in seeing Alma become a prosperous town where families would seek to dwell. School board members as well as town trustees, took the lead in getting a school going in Alma and were among the civic leaders who urged the District 16 school patrons to vote \$1000 in bonds for the construction of a large frame one-room school building in the spring of 1869. The bonds were voted and the schoolhouse rushed to completion before the summer had ended.³⁴

A good, live newspaper can aid in the growth and development of a town to no small degree. Early in the spring of 1869, G. W. Bertram and Abram (Ab.) Sellers looked the prospects over in Alma and decided to launch the first newspaper venture in Wabaunsee County. On April 1, 1869, the first issue of the Wabaunsee County Herald came off the press, its editors and owners, and their equipment housed in a small frame building on Missouri Street.³⁵ The editors had looked about the new town with interest, noting several signs of progress toward growth and a great future. There were six new dwellings in the process of construction as well as the new school building. One of

³²Fairfield, *op. cit.*, Enterprise, Oct. 13, 1911.

³³Supra., Chapter V, p. 96.

³⁴Supra., Chapter V, p. 100.

³⁵Wabaunsee County Herald, April 1, 1869.

the new houses was being constructed for the first resident minister to be sent to Alma, the Lutheran clergyman. Another was for S. H. Fairfield, County Treasurer who would move his family to Alma from Wabaunsee. F. C. Simon, industrious wagon and carriage shop owner, was also building a house. The Herald called attention to the business undertakings in the town as well as receiving advertisements from most of them. There was a good flouring mill, run by Lorenzo Pauly which had two runs of burrs, and also a sawmill; there was a large hotel which John Winkler had just sold to Ed. Krapp for a consideration of \$1500; Schmitz and Meyer's general store had one of the most complete stocks which might be found in any town in Kansas and they kept their four-mule team on the road most of the time hauling in goods and sending out produce which had been taken in trade; there was a first-class printing shop (the Herald's, of course), and there was mail service three times a week with a stage line that ran from Alma to Wamego and back on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and which now connected with the Union Pacific (Kansas Pacific) R.R., now open as far as Sheridan. The editors of the Herald were sure that Alma offered advantages that were many to all comers and they hoped that many would come and see for themselves.³⁶ On April 15, the editors announced, "If Alma continues to improve as it has this spring, the people of Wabaunsee County will see a town here by fall that they will have reason to be proud of."³⁷ In this tone the Herald continued its publication through the first year of its tenure, apparently prospering along with the growing town.

In the fall of 1869, the Herald noted additional signs of progress such as a barber pole in front of a newly opened barber shop on Missouri Street,

³⁶Ibid., April 1, 1869.

³⁷Ibid., April 15, 1869.

several more new houses abuilding, and most impressive of all—Schmitz and Meyer had announced they were closing their dram shop in order to devote all their time to the increased demands of their store business. Their cellar contained over 50 pounds of butter taken in trade from the thrifty Dutch housewives which must be moved to market and new goods must be brought in constantly.³⁸ In September, it suddenly seemed very dull around the town and as if to tempt fate, the editors complained, "Local items are scarce. So much for living in a quiet, peaceable town. No fights, nor footraces, no knockdowns, nor runaways! Nothing to break the monotony. Won't somebody get married or do some other desperate thing?"³⁹

The "desperate thing" that came was not in the form which any of the Alma citizens would have asked. On October 25, a dreadful prairie fire roared into the county from the southwest and speedily seared a wide swath of pasture and woodland, toward Alma. Led by Gottlieb Zwanziger, a large number of the residents south of Alma and some of the residents of the town (though not nearly as many as should have responded, complained the Herald) turned out to fight desperately but determinedly the red monster that would devour the farm buildings, fences, haystacks, and the town of Alma if left to pursue its course unchecked. Alma was spared after more than seven hours of fire-fighting but the fire took its toll of many barns, several houses, all the rail fences and haystacks along its path and the life of one child.⁴⁰ (It is said that rock fence building progressed with a vengeance after this fire and that many farmers decided on rock walls for their barns.) The

³⁸Ibid., Sept. 2, 1869; Oct. 21, 1869.

³⁹Ibid., Sept. 9, 1869.

⁴⁰Ibid., Oct. 28, 1869; Palenske, op. cit., Enterprise, Sept. 29, 1929.

following week, it was reported that the disastrous prairie fire had extended as far east as Ridgeway and had burned a path from the Republican River through Lyon, Osage, Morris, and Wabaunsee counties, 60 miles in width.⁴¹

Many new settlers came into Wabaunsee County all through the year, 1870. Alma grew apace, benefiting from the trade of settlements along lower Mill Creek. The Pottawatomie lands, opened to white settlers in 1869, were now beginning to be filled rapidly as the Indians departed for new homes, elsewhere. Many families sought new homes in Alma as the heads of these families began new business ventures in the town. The demand for houses far exceeded the supply, although it was reported that at least 25 new houses were being put up as rapidly as materials and labor could be obtained for the projects. The Herald viewed the scene in high spirits, reporting that few houses in Alma housed less than two or three families and that three times as many settlers had entered the county as in the same period, last year.⁴² In January, the vanguard of a German colony from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, arrived to secure lands near Alma and to prepare for some 30 to 40 persons who were scheduled to arrive in March. The Pittsburgh colony, having chartered a steamboat, was reported to be on the way in March, bringing household goods, fine blooded stock and imported fowls. Word then came of delay caused by ice on the Ohio but the colony finally arrived on April 14.⁴³ It was also reported in January that an African Baptist colony was to arrive, with from 60 to 100 families, which would take up lands along Mill Creek.⁴⁴ No further

⁴¹Ibid., Nov. 4, 1869.

⁴²Ibid., Feb. 10, 1870; April 14, 1870.

⁴³Ibid., Jan. 6, 1870; Mar. 3, 1870; Mar. 17, 1870; April 14, 1870.

⁴⁴Ibid., Jan. 6, 1870.

mention is made of such a colony but on May 26, the Herald reported, "We learn a colony of gentlemen of African descent are settling on U. S. land west of Alma. Everyone will be a good loyal voter."⁴⁵ On April 23, it was reported that at least 60 families had settled in Alma since January 1. A number of new business ventures were being undertaken and all seemed prosperous.⁴⁶

The Wabaunsee County census of 1870, published on August 18, revealed a phenomenal growth for the county and most of the townships. In 1860, the county residents had totaled 1050, but ten years later the population had increased to 3362. Alma Township had counted 285 inhabitants in 1860, and in 1870 the number had more than tripled, being 895. There being no separate census of Alma, it was estimated that some 180 to 200 persons were residents of the town.⁴⁷ It was evident that the city limits of Alma would need to be expanded to accommodate the many new settlers who were demanding lots upon which to erect dwellings.

In August, Zwanziger's First Addition to the city of Alma was platted and filed, and lots "sold like hot cakes."⁴⁸ The Herald invited all new settlers in the county to view the advantages that Alma had to offer while at the same time prodding the town's residents to beautify their city through cleaning up their premises, cutting weeds, and planting trees and shrubs.⁴⁹ Since November of 1869, S. H. Fairfield had been associated with Ab. Sellers

⁴⁵Ibid., May 26, 1870. No doubt the "loyal voters" would vote Republican since the Herald's political faith was unequivocally Republican.

⁴⁶Ibid., April 23, 1870.

⁴⁷Ibid., Aug. 18, 1870, Plate III, p. 62, Alma, Kansas, 1919. Note the original town and the various additions.

⁴⁸Ibid., Aug. 25, 1870.

⁴⁹Ibid., June 9, 1870.

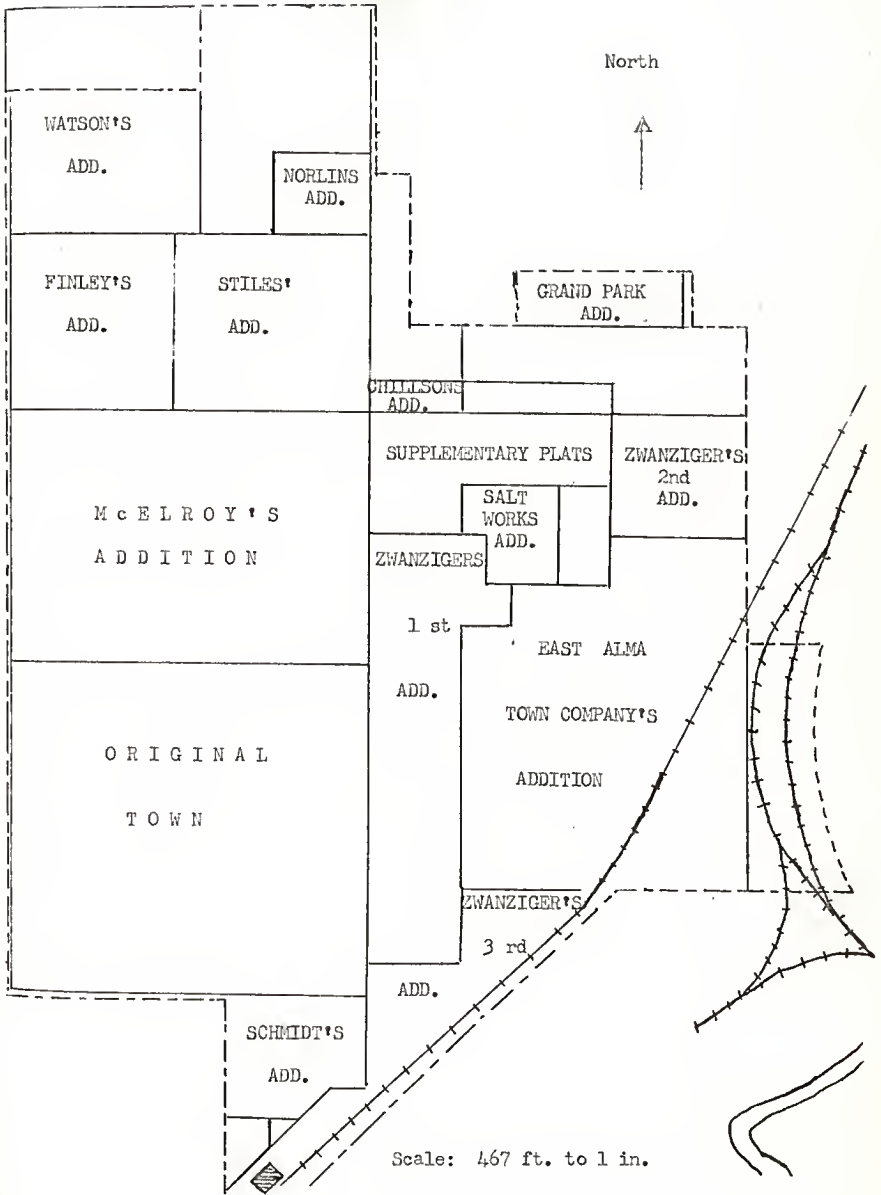
EXPLANATION OF PLATE III

This map gives the present day boundaries of the town of Alma, which have not been changed since 1918. It was taken from the Standard Atlas of Wabaunsee County, Kansas, 1919 edition.

The original town was platted in April, 1866, by Gottlieb Zwanziger, who made the original map of the town, also, signing it, "Gottlieb Zwanziger, Topographical Engineer." (Shown in Plat Book A, Office of Register of Deeds).

The additions were filed as follows:

- Zwanziger's First Addition, August 12, 1870.
- McElroy's Addition, April 1, 1871.
- Stile's Addition, April 8, 1873.
- Watson's Addition (School House Block), April 6, 1875.
- East Alma Town Company's Addition, April 8, 1880.
- Grand Park Addition, April 7, 1886.
- Schmidt's Addition, April 5, 1887.
- Salt Works Addition, April 5, 1887.
- Zwanziger's Second Addition, April 9, 1888.
- Zwanziger's Third Addition, April 9, 1888.
- Norlin's Addition, April 9, 1889.
- Finley's Addition, October 8, 1909.
- Chillson's Addition, October 8, 1909.
- Supplementary Plats, March 28, 1918. (Plats of less than five acres which were lying within the corporate limits as extended in 1918.)



on the Herald, having bought out Bertram's half interest. Fairfield and Sellers comprised an enthusiastic booster team for Alma but were never lax in reminding the citizens of their short-comings nor in prodding them into action for the betterment of the town. Fairfield, especially, was wont to take a firm tone on the editorial page when the occasion warranted it.⁵⁰

As new settlers continued to come into Wabaunsee County in large numbers through 1870 and 1871, new towns began to spring up with aspirations which precipitated a new county seat contest. Newbury was platted in March of 1870; its founders hoped to persuade the Santa Fe to build past their town and also aspired to persuade the voters of Wabaunsee County that the county seat should be relocated at Newbury.⁵¹ The new town on Mulberry Creek, one mile north of the present town of Paxico, was laid out in grandiose proportions on a 160-acre site. In the center a public square of eight acres was reserved upon which the town proposed to build a handsome new courthouse for the seat of county government. A petition was soon being circulated throughout the county which prayed an election for the purpose of relocation of the county seat. The contest waxed hot and furious along with the summer heat. Even the new townsite of Eskridge, "with its one house," became a candidate. Wabaunsee prepared to try once more to regain her lost glories but with faint hope for success. The citizens of the embattled county seat shoo off their lethargy on the subject and dared all comers. Not until early January, 1871, was the petition asking relocation laid before the County Board. An election was called for February 7, 1871 and the contestants entered the fray with

⁵⁰Supra., Chapter V, pp. 100-101.

⁵¹Thomson, op. cit., pp. 75, 325.

increased vigor and venom. The Herald magnanimously printed all the offers from each of the aspirants.⁵² Newbury offered "an eight-acre site upon which it would build a courthouse and allow the county free use of it for five years." The site was to be deeded to the county outright in exchange for obtaining the county seat. Eskridge offered to build a frame building, two stories high, and deed it to the county along with the site.⁵³ The Alma citizens took a look at these offers and realized that they must be countered with something much more magnanimous and permanent in the way of a courthouse offer. Forty-six citizens of the town and community placed their names on a bond of \$10,000 which was to be used to purchase a permanent site upon which would be erected a building of imposing dimensions and construction which they offered to the county as follows:

On a lot of 200 feet by 160 feet (shall be constructed) a courthouse of stone construction which shall be two stories high and of dimensions 40 feet by 50 feet. It shall have five rooms, one of these to be a large courtroom and the others to be used for county offices, and there shall be constructed three fireproof vaults. It is to be conveyed to the county by deed on November 1, 1871, and to become permanent county property provided the county seat not be removed within twenty-one years.⁵⁴

The names which were signed to the bond represented every enterprising citizen of Alma as well as a number of their friends in the rural areas. It is said that the money to build the courthouse was raised through subscription, half in Alma and half in the township.⁵⁵

The February 7th election determined only that there must be a "run-off" which was promptly set for February 21, 1871. Alma had received 369 votes,

⁵²Herald, Jan. 19, 1871.

⁵³Ibid., Jan. 19, 1871.

⁵⁴Register of Deeds Record, E, p. 499. Italics, mine.

⁵⁵Andreas, op. cit., p. 992.

Eskridge (surprisingly) 256, Newbury 217, and Wabaunsee 2 votes.⁵⁶ The two contestants in the final election, Alma and Eskridge, began a rivalry during that bitterly fought contest of two weeks which has endured to the present day. Also, it seemed as if most of the county outside of Alma Township would turn against Alma. However, Wabaunsee Township decided to support Alma rather than Eskridge which was too far away. The residents of Newbury should have preferred Alma as a location for the county seat rather than Eskridge, which was situated in the southeast part of the county. However, its bitterly disappointed promoters encouraged the voters of Newbury Township to throw their votes to Eskridge. Rivalries and disappointments notwithstanding, Alma was for the third time the victor in a county seat election, although by the not very comfortable majority of 465 votes to 429 votes for Eskridge. Alma, having participated in five elections on the issue, was for the third time in five years, declared the legal seat of government of Wabaunsee County.⁵⁷ The condition of "no removal within a period of 21 years" was apparently a deterrent to further aspirants to take the county seat away from Alma. No further petitions were presented on the subject, although there may have been an occasional muttered threat as new towns sprang up with the coming of the railroads in the 1880's. Alma still retains the county seat.

Alma's progress-minded citizens received a boost in morale during the final heat of the county seat election. On February 7, 1871, the Legislature passed an act whereby Alma was declared a corporate city of the third class.⁵⁸ Since the city government would henceforth be under the direction of a mayor

⁵⁶Thomson, op. cit., p. 75.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁸Andreas, op. cit., p. 992.

of a mayor and council to be elected by popular vote, the town council called an election for early March. In the interim, Sam'l R. Weed was acting mayor but he refused to run for election. Charles F. Diessel became the first elected mayor of Alma.⁵⁹ With their city under new government and the county seat safely tucked away, the residents of Alma went contentedly back to the everyday business of making a living and the managing of family affairs. However, civic improvements were not neglected, nor was the promised courthouse forgotten. In March of 1871, the contracts were let for the new courthouse. One year later its keys were presented to the County Commissioners and its doors opened for business.⁶⁰

Alma's growth through the 1870's was steady but did not approach boom proportions. The chief drawback to the town's expansion was the lack of a railroad. This was not to be obtained until 1880 and then only after years of disappointment and painful waiting and at high cost.⁶¹ Alma thrived, however, as the chief trading center of the Mill Creek valley. In 1875, a salt industry was established which gave promise of becoming one of great value to the town.

The Alma "Dutch" have always loved to play practical jokes. The discovery of salt brine so strong and pure that it became the basis of an industry is said to have come about as the result of someone's misguided sense of humor. The elder citizens who chuckled over the story of "Alma's Oil Strike" did not always agree on the identity of the "joker who poured a jug of

⁵⁹Revised Ordinances of the City of Alma, 1900, p. 3.

⁶⁰Thomson, op. cit., pp. 326, 328.

⁶¹Supra., Chapter IV, pp. 100-101.

kerosene into a well which was being dug on lower Missouri Street."⁶² When the water was sampled and it not only tasted of "oil" but oil was seen floating on top of the water, a jubilant cry of "oil strike" was raised. The town went wild; a development company was formed which sold shares of stock far and wide, and a drilling rig went into action at once. The drill struck no oil, but at a depth of 178 feet salt water began to flow from the well. Exploring to a depth of 585 feet, strong salt brine which tested 65 percent salt was the result. Promoters of oil drilling operations now decided to develop a salt works instead and preparations to operate the Alma Salt Works began in the summer of 1874. A number of large kettles were purchased; two evaporating vats 16 by 112 feet were constructed, and a brick smokestack of 60 feet in height towered over the works. On January 20, 1875, the fires were started under 25 huge kettles and the brine pumped into them. Hundreds of cords of firewood, covering several acres of ground awaited use. At the height of production, in 1877, the output was reported to be from 30 to 50 barrels of pure white salt per day, which went at the asking price of \$2.00 per barrel.⁶³ However, within five years the Salt Works, "which promised so much," was closed down, its investors looking in vain for their money. One reason given was that the price of fuel was too dear and that there were not sufficient funds for adequate development. A salt company from Hutchinson purchased the drill and some of the other equipment but for many years the lonely brick smokestack was a painful reminder of the mismanagement of an

⁶²Thomson, op. cit., p. 314; Wabaunsee County Directory, op. cit., pp. 39-41. The source of the material used is Fairfield.

⁶³Thomson, op. cit., pp. 314, 330.

industry which should have prospered its investors and the town.⁶⁴

In the decade prior to 1880, Alma's citizens prospered in most of their business ventures. This was the period in which churches were established and their buildings constructed. A stone schoolhouse was built to meet the needs of Alma's rapidly growing school population in 1875. The town began to take pride in its appearance, grading its streets, setting out trees and shrubs, painting or otherwise improving its dwellings and store buildings, and building many new buildings. Some of the new business buildings were of stone but for the most part the construction of elaborate stone business blocks waited until the late 1880's. The census figures for 1880 showed that Alma had 369 residents while the county total was 8757.⁶⁵ City and county now waited anxiously for the coming of a railroad, which, although only a feeder line of the Santa Fe, it was hoped would bring boom times to the towns along its route.

⁶⁴Andreas, op. cit., p. 992; Wabaunsee County Directory, pp. 40-41.

⁶⁵State Board of Agriculture, Second Biennial Report, Topeka, Kansas: 1880-1881, p. 552.

CHAPTER IV. BOOM, BUST, AND SOBER RECOVERY, 1880-1905

Resolved: "That Pride and Ambition are More Detrimental
to Mankind than Ignorance and Superstition!"¹

The Rooster Crows For Victory! King Boodle is Dead!
The Course of the Signal is Vindicated!²

The voting of \$138,700 in aid bonds to the Santa Fe Railroad, August 2, 1879, in order to obtain a feeder line through Wabaunsee County,³ was the result of ten years of frantic effort on the part of many progressive leaders, who saw their county being hemmed in on all sides by railroads from which its people received little or no benefit. The elder citizens must have recalled with bitterness, the lost opportunity of 1866 when the county might have obtained the main line of the Santa Fe at the bargain price of \$50,000.⁴ Since 1866, Wamego, Manhattan and Junction City had been served by the Union Pacific, across Kansas (Kansas Pacific), and the Santa Fe had built across the state through Osage and Lyon counties, reaching Burlingame in 1869. By 1880, 3104 miles of single-track railroad had been laid in Kansas but Wabaunsee County had not a single mile.⁵

In the spring of 1880, Alma, and all of the towns along the proposed route of the Manhattan, Alma, and Burlingame Railroad, as the line being built northwestward through Wabaunsee County was called, waited impatiently for the day when the whistle of the first train to approach the town could

¹Alma Enterprise, Dec. 7, 1888. Subject of a debate by the Alma Literary Society, in the midst of Alma's hectic boom period.

²Alma Signal, April 11, 1891. Matt Thomson's headlines just after the city election at which the Limerick "Boodle Gang" was finally defeated.

³Matt Thomson, Early History of Wabaunsee County, p. 324.

⁴Chapter II, p. 49.

⁵A. B. Sageser, "The Rails Go Westward," M.S.S. copy of Chapter X, in Kansas, The First One Hundred Years, Vol. I.

be heard in the distance. In early June of 1880, the M. A. & B. track layers reached Alma and by the end of the month they were moving up the line toward Wabaunsee. On August 1, 1880, the Manhattan, Alma, and Burlingame Railroad opened its 55.41 miles of track connecting Burlingame on the Santa Fe with Manhattan on the Union Pacific, to passenger and freight service.⁶ On the first day of September, mail service was inaugurated. Alma and Wabaunsee and the new towns of Eskridge, Harveyville and Fairfield rejoiced at receiving mail twice a day.⁷

Alma prepared to stage the most grandiose and gala Fourth of July celebration which the county seat had ever known, to celebrate the Nation's birthday and the coming of Alma's first railroad. The 4th falling on Sunday, the big day was set for July 5. The News carried banner headlines, announcing that 5000 people were expected to attend and that there would be five bands. The celebration fulfilled all expectations. Col. E. Sanford of Eskridge was the speaker of the day, delivering an excellent discourse concerning the growth of railroad transportation in the United States. There were baseball games, foot races, rope-pulling contests, and contests to see who could eat the most fried chicken from the bulging picnic baskets. There was tuneful band music all day long and dancing and fireworks far into the night.⁸

The coming of Alma's first railroad brought new residents to the town. Several new business houses had opened their doors by 1884 and it was necessary to give increased space to the professional cards in the newspapers.

⁶First Annual Report of Board of Kansas Railroad Commissioners, (Topeka: 1883), p. 32.

⁷Wabaunsee County News, Sept. 4, 1880.

⁸Ibid., June 30, 1880; July 7, 1880.

Seven attorneys seemed too many for a town of 519 population, so it was not surprising to observe their announcements of opening real estate, collections, and mortgage loan agencies or to find some of them filing for the offices of County Attorney, Justice of the Peace, or Probate Judge.⁹ Two banks, two drug stores, a second hotel, a creamery, a bakery and restaurant, a marble works, a feed business and new livery and sale stable, and two new grocery and general merchandise stores were new business operations in Alma since 1880. C. O. Kinne had moved to Alma from Newbury in 1881 and was the partner of S. H. Fairfield in a thriving real estate and abstract business. The Stuewe Bros. Creamery installed a new engine in their creamery which enabled 600 pounds of butter per day to be produced and shipped to city markets. The Alma Roller Mills were shipping a high grade of patent flour far and wide. Louis Palenske operated an up-to-date photograph gallery in addition to conducting an extensive business in his book and stationery store, selling musical instruments as a sideline. The farmers of Wabaunsee County needed to look no farther than Alma to buy the latest in farm machinery. Housewives could supply their families' needs and dress themselves and their daughters in the latest fashion by shopping at Alma's clothing and drygoods stores. This cheerful survey of Alma greeted the readers of a new newspaper which set up its press in competition with that of the News, in October of 1884. The editors, publishers, and owners of the Alma Enterprise, V. C. Welch and Frank I. Sage, endorsed Alma as a wideawake, coming metropolis.¹⁰

The Alma Enterprise set out to live up to its name, greeting its readers

⁹State Board of Agriculture Biennial Reports, 1883-1884, p. 425.

¹⁰Alma Enterprise, October 11, 1884.

as an enthusiastic booster of all of Alma's business, industrial, and civic enterprises, as it made its initial bow on October 11, 1884. Its impressive seven-column folio of eight pages was crammed with information from many sources and gave evidence of generous support from Alma's business and professional men, as was evidenced from the ample space taken up by their advertisements. The editors stated with forthrightness that their initial aim was to publish a live, readable, and informative newspaper but that they hoped to make a living while doing it. Their politics were Republican, believing that, "the Republican Party (in power) is the nearest conducive to the largest degree of prosperity for the country ... but we shall, in every instance, give our support to principles rather than men or party ... our voice and influence will at all times be given on the side of morality and in favor of education, progress, and good government."¹¹ The reader, then, could turn the page and find the Enterprise's listing of its choices of candidates for county, state, and national offices, noting that the tickets were not split in any instance. As the 1884 national slugfest was in full swing on the political front, the Enterprise predicted with confidence that the Republican tickets would sweep the national, state and county elections.¹² A few weeks later, the reader had to search diligently to ascertain that Grover Cleveland had defeated James G. Blaine for President.¹³

The Enterprise soon boasted that its circulation topped that of any newspaper in the county, and by 1886, it was the official newspaper for both

¹¹Ibid., October 11, 1884.

¹²Ibid., October 25, 1885.

¹³Ibid., Nov. 16, 1885. However, Cleveland's victory was in doubt for nearly two weeks. The Enterprise published the President's message in full on the front page, December 6, 1884.

the town and the county. In spite of the optimistic boosting of the town by the Enterprise, Alma found that its boom had disappointing dimensions by 1885. The volume of business began to fall off, somewhat, as the farmers tightened their purse strings. The farmers had begun to feel the pinch of falling market prices for their products and at the same time found prices for farm machinery and other equipment climbing, along with rising freight costs. The farmers of Wabaunsee County were joining the Alliance and placing their names on the list of voters who were choosing a slate of candidates pledged to end extravagance in county government.¹⁴ A group of Alma's most ambitious business leaders began to discuss plans for development of some natural resources which lay near Alma in hopes that an industry would result which would bring employment to hundreds of people and prosperity to the whole town. The town which would be a thriving metropolis must have such an industry. And an industry, in order to thrive, must have dependable and adequate transportation facilities that its product could readily be shipped to distant markets and needed materials be obtained. The branch line of a railroad was not adequate in these respects. Alma needed a main line.¹⁵

In the fall of 1885, rumors were afloat that the Rock Island Railroad Company proposed to obtain a charter in Kansas in the near future to span the state with its main line. Excitement mounted and plans multiplied as towns vied with each other to induce this important railroad to build past their doors. Alma's ambitious boosters of industrial enterprise took the lid off their planning when rumors persisted that the Rock Island's proposed

¹⁴Ibid., October 8, 1885.

¹⁵Ibid., November 28, 1885.

route would follow the Mill Creek valley, as it crossed Wabaunsee County.

The Rock Island (Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific) was chartered in Kansas on December 30, 1855, as the Chicago, Kansas, and Nebraska Railroad. It began at once to obtain franchises, rights-of-way, and other property.¹⁶ Grading started from Elwood, Kansas, on July 1, 1886, readying a 43-mile stretch from Elwood to Horton by late September, with the tracklayers moving in to finish this first segment of the Rock Island line, in Kansas, by early winter. Topeka was reached early in 1887 and it appeared that the Rock Island would span the state in record time.¹⁷

When the route of the Rock Island had been announced, the townships of Wabaunsee County, through which the railroad would build, got busy with a bond drive. At the election held on July 17, 1886, the voters of Maple Hill, Newbury, Alma, and Washington townships gave \$107,000 in aid bonds to the Rock Island with an enthusiastic endorsement of 690 to 29 votes in favor of the bonds.¹⁸ This time, it was felt, a good return was to be expected for the money expended, since the main line of an important railroad was obtained.

Immediately upon the heels of the bond election, the Rock Island surveyors moved across the county and the towns along the route buzzed with excitement in anticipation of coming events. Alma's new mayor and most ambitious business leader, John F. Limerick, was now ready to announce his plans for the development of a thriving industry near Alma which would bring expansion and prosperity to the town. The magic word was "Coal!"

The M.A. & B. had carried an assortment of prospective seekers for

¹⁶W. E. Hayes, *Iron Road to Empire*, New York: 1953, p. 114.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

¹⁸Innison, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

business opportunities to the town of Alma, since 1880. A number of these newcomers might be classified as "Yankee" or "easterner" but the majority of the new business and professional men of Alma were of that variety of restless, opportunity seeking, Anglo-Americans who were former residents of one of the prairie states east of the Mississippi River. S. H. Fairfield, long a successful business man in Alma, was a "down east Yankee" from Connecticut, certainly one of the sharpest of the Yankee traders. John F. Limerick was from the state of Illinois but little else was known of his background when he came to Alma in 1882. Limerick came into the town, with a quiet air of confidence and with money in his pockets along with the evidence of credits at an eastern bank. Soon, the firm of "J. F. Limerick & Company, Bankers," opened its doors for business.¹⁹ It was amazing how quickly Alma's new banker won the confidence of many of Alma's enterprising business men. At first, he listened. He heard the stories of the town's early business ventures and, of course, he heard the story of the hoax that had led to test-drilling for oil which was non-existent. To one part of this story, Limerick listened intently. He noted that the oil drill was reported to have passed through two shallow veins of coal before the drilling had been stopped at 585 feet.

The news that a test drill had begun boring on the 160-acre property just east of Alma, which John Limerick had recently acquired from Joseph Treu, came shortly after the Rock Island surveyors had moved through the county. The elder citizens shook their heads and recalled that a state geologist had reported that no coal in paying quantities underlay the lands of Wabaunsee County.²⁰ But the majority of Alma's citizens were boom-minded;

¹⁹Alma Enterprise, April 9, 1886. Sketch of Alma's new mayor.

²⁰Ibid., November 19, 1886.

they were willing to go along with any activity which might bring boom times to Alma. On April 13, 1886, they had expressed their confidence in the leadership of John Limerick by electing him the mayor of Alma by a vote of 80 to 61, over George Hoelling, the incumbent.²¹ By this action, the majority of Alma's voters had signified their willingness to see an end to the leadership of the more conservative element among Alma's citizens.

Most of the Germans who had been active in the affairs of the town in its early years were now retired from active business competition, some to the privacy of their farms and others no longer on the Alma scene. These men had been the town's founders or were closely associated with them in conducting the town's early affairs. They were such men as Henry Schmitz, August Meyer, Herman Dirker, Dr. August Brasche, Edward Krapp, Joseph Treu, Gottlieb Zwanziger, and John Winkler.²¹ They could not have been accused of conservative activities in behalf of the early town of Alma; rather they displayed ambitiousness tempered with level-headedness. Active on the Alma scene of the 1880's were a number of business and professional men who might have been described as "ambitious but cautious." In this category were Louis Palenske, George Hoelling, W. D. Deans, Henry and Wm. Pauley, George Sutherland, Albert Stuewe, S. H. Fairfield, C. O. Kinne, R. J. Kerans, W. T. Watson, and the attorneys, James Carroll, J. H. Barnes, and John T. Keagy. Of this group, three were mayors during the long period of painful recovery following the collapse of Alma's boom. These three men were Pauly, Deans, and Sutherland. There were many others, enthusiastic supporters of Limerick

²¹Ibid., April 9, 1886.

²²Schmitz, Krapp, Zwanziger, Dirker and Treu were on their farms; brasche and Meyer were dead; Winkler operated his hotel in Alma until 1884.

during the first two or three years of his activities in behalf of Alma's industrial expansion, who lost confidence and withdrew their support but not in time to take any action which might have prevented the sad state in which the city of Alma found its finances as a result of Limerick's mismanagement. The editors of the Enterprise, Welch and Sage, continued to be active boosters of the Mayor Limerick's projects until, in the year of 1890, many of the questionable aspects of his activities were revealed.

Optimism was high all through the Mill Creek valley during the year in which its residents awaited the coming of the Rock Island Railroad. The new towns of Maple Hill, Paxico, and Alta Vista, sprang into being in time to greet the Rock Island tracklayers and were anticipating an influx of settlers with the coming of the first passenger trains. Alma's boom was on "with a capital B," announced the Enterprise, two weeks before the tracklayers reached Alma on March 24, 1887. On April 3, the first Rock Island train left Alma for Topeka and St. Joe (St. Joseph, Missouri), these distances being announced as 35 miles and 125 miles, respectively.²³ July 15, it was announced that mail service "has been extended west to Herington and Alma is to have four daily mails with two on Sunday."²⁴

John Limerick's prospecting operations had continued throughout the winter and in February came the announcement that the drill was down to a depth of 550 feet, a vein of coal of 18 inches in thickness having been struck at 440 feet. The drill would continue to a much greater depth in its explorations.²⁵ Alma returned the mayor to office by a large majority on April 3,

²³Alma Enterprise, March 25, 1887; April 3, 1887.

²⁴Ibid., July 15, 1887.

²⁵Ibid., Feb. 4, 1887.

and on May 16, its voters cheerfully endorsed a proposition that the city should issue \$9000 worth of bonds for the purpose of taking \$3000 worth of stock in each of three mining and prospecting companies headed by Limerick.²⁶ The district court ruled that this procedure was not allowable under the Kansas law which limited cities to certain percentages of their assessed valuation on bond issues, and a temporary injunction against the issue of the bonds, was granted on June 15. The mayor and council promptly granted a petition which asked a new bond election on July 18, at which time the voters endorsed an issue of "\$9000 in bonds for purposes of general improvements."²⁷ On May 20, the Enterprise devoted almost half of its issue to ballyhoo in behalf of the Limerick enterprises and Alma's boom. There was a full page given to a review of Alma's history, its present day business and industrial enterprises and a full column write-up entitled, "Alma's Natural Resources." There was said to be silver, coal, oil, salt, building stone, cement, mineral water, and possibly, natural gas. The Limerick drill was now at a depth of 800 feet and several veins of coal which appeared to be of excellent quality bituminous coal had been found. The drill would soon be replaced with one having a diamond bit and drilling would be continued to a much greater depth. A coal shaft was soon to be sunk to a depth of 600 feet or more. Alma was headlined as "A Sparkling Diamond Nestling on the Bosom of Beautiful Wabaunsee County, the Golden Agricultural Belt of Kansas." For good measure the headlines added, "Its Boom Reverberates Over Hill, Dale, and Valley."²⁸

While all the ballyhoo was "reverberating," a bonafide industry had

²⁶Ibid., April 10; May 20, 1887.

²⁷Ibid., June 17; July 22, 1887.

²⁸Ibid., May 20, 1887.

begun to ship its product via the Rock Island and to make a name for itself. The Alma Stone Quarry, also backed by Limerick but leased to a local operator, was shipping the Alma stone to Topeka to be used in the new Rock Island depot and contracts had been obtained to supply the stone for the new bridge across the Kaw at Manhattan. Soon, work was to be started on the Limerick and Crafts business block in Alma, which also would be constructed from the Alma stone.²⁹

Alma's boom was moving along at such a rapid rate, by the close of 1887, that the Enterprise tried the effect of a mild tone in its reporting. On December 9, its readers must have been surprised to read, "Alma's growth is gradual, steady, healthy--not a boom."³⁰ With the town bursting its seams from an increase of more than 200 residents in less than two years and with the carpenters unable to keep up with the orders for the construction of new houses, not to mention the large volume of goods being moved from the merchants' shelves, this description hardly appeared to fit the picture. In March, the Enterprise conceded that Alma had "a boom with whiskers on it."³¹

Mayor Limerick and the city council could point out several civic improvements which had been brought about under their direction prior to the election time in the spring of 1888. Board sidewalks had been ordered laid throughout the business district and in front of many residences. Alma's streets were being graded and were now lighted with "gasoline" street lamps; a new jail had been opened for business at a cost of \$1000; and the city limits had been expanded by three new additions with three more ready to be

²⁹Ibid., May 20, 1887; Sept. 30, 1887.

³⁰Ibid., December 9, 1887.

³¹Ibid., March 16, 1888.

platted in April.³² With gratifying majorities, Mayor Limerick and most of the council were returned to office, on April 3.³³

Following his election for the third term, Mayor Limerick offered a handsome gift to the city of Alma. He offered to deed a 16-acre tract of land from his 160 acres, which lay east of Alma, for use as a city park, making the condition that the city should bear the expenses of readying the park grounds and of maintenance; also, he was to be granted a right-of-way which would give access to the Cement works, on the Limerick land east of the park. The townspeople thought the mayor was very generous and the city council accepted the gift on behalf of the City of Alma, expressing its thanks through a resolution written into the Minute Book.³⁴ Small wonder that the citizens voted a new bond issue when requested on June 5, 1888. The new bonds issued were for the purpose of "general improvements."³⁵ Through the month of June, money and much hard work were expended in getting the new city park ready to receive a large crowd at the annual Fourth of July celebration. The city council generously authorized the spending of \$250 for fireworks.³⁶ (Some of the townspeople may have recalled that the city council had failed to act in the matter of obtaining any fire-fighting equipment for Alma.)³⁷

The first blot on the bright picture of Alma's boom came on October 12, 1888, with the stunning news that Joseph Fields, Treasurer of Wabaussee County could not account for a deficit in the county funds of \$24,240. On

³²City of Alma, Minute Book, C., pp. 18-34, 75-88; Plate 3, p. 62.

³³Ibid., p. 89.

³⁴City Minute Book, C, pp. 92-93.

³⁵Ibid., p. 125.

³⁶Enterprise, June 15, 1888.

³⁷Thomson, op. cit., p. 345.

deposit, at the First National Bank of J. F. Limerick & Co., was but \$100.15 of the county's money.³⁸ Joseph Fields was one of the most respected men in Alma and in the whole county. If such a man as Fields could mismanage the affairs of public office so badly, might it not be expedient to inquire into the activities of some other persons holding offices of public trust? There were not enough voices asking such a question at this time to receive much attention in Alma. The case of Joseph Fields dragged through a year of investigations and prosecution. When the Fields bondsmen attempted to realize something from the supposed assets of Fields, which included a new \$4000 house and some livestock, they found that everything had been mortgaged to the hilt, F. F. Limerick holding the mortgages. Before Fields was finally acquitted of embezzlement charges, a number of reputations had lost their bright luster.³⁹

The citizens of Alma and many persons in the Alma trade area were dealt another blow to their faith in the integrity and wisdom of those who managed affairs of finance, whether public funds or private, when, on the 23rd day of January, 1889, the Bank of Wabaunsee County failed to open its doors.⁴⁰ This was the first bank in the county to succumb to the effects of the hard times which much of the farm population was experiencing. It appears that this bank failure partially resulted from poor management, but its owners were not accused of dishonesty. No large sums of Alma money had been deposited in the Bank of Wabaunsee County, since the First National had the lion's share of Alma's banking business. However, the hapless County Treasury took

³⁸Enterprise, October 13, 1888.

³⁹Alma Signal, Nov. 16, 1889; Fields was acquitted after a lengthy charge from the presiding judge on "reasonable" doubt of intent to embezzle."

⁴⁰Enterprise, January 25, 1889.

another loss--over \$5000 in county funds had been deposited at the end of the year when taxes were being paid. Banker Limerick hastened to assure his customers that his bank was sound and they need not fear for the safety of their money. The Enterprise backed up this announcement with the assurance that the First National Bank had ample funds available to pay out its depositors should there be a run on the bank. No run developed.⁴¹

Mayor Limerick saw to it that the reports of Alma's coal strike received widespread and frequent publicity, during the years of 1889 to 1890. He reported with frequency on the test borings brought to the surface by the diamond drill and kept the spirit of anticipation high in Alma. He began the year by a lavish housewarming to celebrate the opening of the new Limerick bank building which would now house the First National Bank and the extensive Limerick General Merchandise Store. There were 600 invited guests, who came away at a late hour, certain that they had never before been so magnificently entertained.⁴² In January, the Park Valley Development on Limerick's land adjoining the City Park was announced. The mayor offered choice lots for sale, in a development which would soon be included in the city limits as the Grand Park and that a school would be built there when the need arose. In the meantime, while waiting for the shaft to be sunk at the coal mine, there was an industry ready to go into full production in a few days. The Alma Cement Works had installed three large kilns and soon would begin to fill their first order, for 15,000 barrels of cement.⁴³ The testing at the "coal-hole" was at the depth of 1586 feet on February 8. By March 1, at 1680 feet,

⁴¹Ibid., January 25, 1889.

⁴²Ibid., January 18, 1889.

⁴³Ibid., January 18, 1889.

four veins of coal had been struck, and each was pronounced of better quality than the one preceding it. A 40-inch vein at 1680 feet was pronounced of excellent bituminous quality, and at 1708 feet came the announcement of a vein of bituminous coal 24 inches thick. Within a few days, two veins, pronounced "anthracite," of 24 and 36 inches in thickness were found at depths of 1740 feet and 1810 feet, respectively. "Alma's coal strike" brought inquiries from many outsiders and the newspaper reporters from Topeka. On March 22, the Enterprise carried a reprint of a full column write-up from the Topeka Capital-Commonwealth, entitled, "Alma's Good Luck." The Enterprise remarked happily, that Alma's coal strike was causing excitement far and wide.⁴⁴ The events which followed can be partially attributed to the super-charged atmosphere which enveloped the town.

Appearing in the minutes of a special meeting of the city council on March 18, 1889, is the following resolution:

Resolved: That complying with the request of many citizens and electors publicly expressed at a meeting of the citizens on Wednesday, of the 16th day of March, 1889, we deem it advisable to call a special election to obtain the will of the electors of this city, as to ... whether or not the City Council of Alma (shall) issue bonds ... in the sum of \$25,000 for the purpose of carrying out general improvements.⁴⁵

The Enterprise sounded the trumpet for the special election on April 1:

The time is now here when the people of Alma have it in their own hands to make their future one of wealth and prosperity and greatness, or to crush out every sentiment that tends to the establishment of a city of unlimited wealth, prosperity, and population.... The finds of four good veins of coal are useless without further development.... Mayor Lincoln is willing to guarantee our people that work will be commenced at once in the sinking of a shaft and that it will be carried to a successful completion.... Vote the bonds!⁴⁶

⁴⁴Enterprise, March 22, 1889.

⁴⁵City Minute Book, C, p. 177.

⁴⁶Enterprise, March 29, 1889.

The few voices raised against voting \$25,000 worth of bonds, fell on deaf ears. On April 1, 1889, the Alma electors not only endorsed the bonds by the large majority of 140 to 65 but they gave John Limerick 196 votes to 115 votes cast for Louis Palenske, for the office of mayor. The women of Alma were allowed to vote for the mayor and councilmen but they had no voice in city affairs of finance.⁴⁷ The contract for sinking the coal shaft was let on May 31, and the work proceeded speedily through the summer and fall.⁴⁸ Stock was sold in the Alma Coal Mining Company in the amount of \$10,000, each purchaser of \$200 worth of stock being given a town lot in the Park Valley Addition.⁴⁹

Alma's prosperity appeared solid enough in the summer of 1889, but there came "a voice crying in the wilderness" which was determined to call attention to the hollowness of this bright bubble of boom prosperity. One wonders if the press of duty in winding up his tenth year as the County Superintendent of Schools, prevented Matt Thomson from peering intently at the management and mismanagement of Alma's affairs, prior to the date of the bond election. Thomson's opening gun, in what rapidly moved into a fight with "no holds barred," came in the form of "An Open Letter to a Friend," in the Enterprise on July 12. Thomson charged that I. D. Gardner, the editor of the Alma News, by his own admission, had "winked and kept still at the doings of the guerillas, here," and thus had prospered--perhaps as a "tool of the gang, receiving a share of the boodle."⁵⁰ (The News had been the official news outlet for

⁴⁷Enterprise, April 5, 1889; Alma Signal, April 12, 1890.

⁴⁸Enterprise, May 31, 1889; Aug. 16, 1889.

⁴⁹Ibid., June 7, 1889.

⁵⁰Ibid., July 12, 1889.

the city council for some time.) Gardner's reply to the "scurrilous charges," accused Thomson of being a "kicker" and of being "against the progress and prosperity for Alma."⁵¹ The Enterprise, at this time, began its role of attempting to avoid being forced to take sides in a fight of which it wanted no part. As the months passed, and there were increasing doubts in the minds of many of Alma's influential citizens as to the wisdom and integrity of John Limerick, in his management of the city's affairs, the Enterprise became increasingly cautious in its statements. It found less to condone and to praise on the Alma scene, now and then joining the Signal in asking some embarrassing questions. At the time of Matt Thomson's debut as a newspaper owner and editor, however, the Enterprise was still an energetic booster of Alma's boom enterprises and it greeted the first issue of the Signal with less than enthusiasm:

The Signal, Matt Thomson, editor, made its bow to the public last Saturday.... It will, undoubtedly be Democratic in politics.... He undoubtedly has an object in view, and from our knowledge of Mr. T., the readers of the Signal will soon find it out.⁵²

His readers found out his object at once and with no uncertainty.

Thomson began, with his second issue, to inquire into the activities of Mayor Limerick and his close associates. He asked with persistent voice, "What disposition has been made of the city bonds?" Not only that, but he brought out the idea, which should not have seemed novel, that surely some of the \$25,000 voted for "purposes of general improvements for the City of Alma," should be used for improvements, such as the purchase of some fire-fighting equipment, for instance. On November 9, there appeared a lengthy

⁵¹Ibid., July 17, 1889.

⁵²Ibid., Sept. 12, 1889. The first issue of the Signal was on Sept. 7.

editorial entitled, "The City Bonds." Nothing, said Thomson, could be learned of the disposition of the bonds. He felt the city had a right to hear from Mayor Limerick, a report on the disposition of the bonds and also to what use the money had been or was being put.⁵³ Others soon added their voices to that of the Signal in asking for a report on the disposition of the city bonds. On February 22, 1890, the Signal reported that the mayor had finally answered the query concerning the bonds by saying, informally, at a meeting of the city council, that "the money has been put in the coal-hole, where the people voted it."⁵⁴ In spirit, this was where the people had voted it, but Matt Thomson looked at the letter of the law which made such use of a city bond issue, illegal.

The spring election became a contest for the first time in four years, and its result caused the Signal to cry "Foul!" A total of 416 votes cast in a city of 950 residents, seemed to Thomson, an improbable number of legal votes even with the ladies being allowed to vote. He accused the "Limerick Boodle Gang" of scooping the city election by the use of transient votes.⁵⁵ There were few peaceful moments in the city of Alma during the remainder of the Limerick regime--the townspeople began to "choose up sides."

In the summer of 1889, following the Bank of Wabauunsee County's failure the preceding year, a new bank opened its doors which immediately had the confidence of most of the people of the community. Louis Palenske was a life-long resident of the Alma community and had engaged in business in the town for a number of years. Palenske was known as a progressive businessman but

⁵³Alma Signal, Nov. 9, 1889.

⁵⁴Ibid., Feb. 22, 1889.

⁵⁵Ibid., April 12, 1890. The vote was Limerick 247, C. O. Kinne 169.

cautious, careful, and trustworthy, as well. Palenske's "Alma State Bank" became the depository for the county funds and for those of many of his old friends in the Alma Trade area. In the spring of 1889, when he had run for mayor against Limerick, Palenske had not been able to defeat him, as those of the conservative spirit were as yet the minority group in Alma. Also, Palenske's Democratic politics placed him in a minority group. The presence of the Alma State Bank, as the competitor of the First National in the fall of 1890, no doubt, helped to keep many of the town's business establishments from going under during the Limerick debacle. Certainly, its presence prevented financial distress for many of the people of the town and community.

Before the end of May in 1890, preparations at the coal shaft were being made to begin the mining of enough coal from the shallow veins to provide fuel for the power needed in the operations at the shaft. However, reports were current all through the summer that the Coal Company was in sore financial straits and that work at the shaft must soon cease if additional funds could not be raised. In August, workmen at the mine were complaining that they had not been paid during the past few weeks or that they had been forced to take pay in company scrip which they could trade out at the company store at a discount.⁵⁶ Uneasiness deepened to anxiety among Alma's investors in the stock of the Alma Coal Company as rumor piled upon rumor. Matt Thomson's query in the Signal of May 10, had quieted no troubled waters:

Has confidence in those persons developing Alma's coal prospects been misplaced? Was their judgment faulty or was there intent to mislead when a vein pronounced to be 16 inches thick has been found to be only eight inches and the so-called 30-inch vein is but 24 inches in

⁵⁶Ibid., Aug. 12, 1890.

thickness? Have the people lost confidence? If our people have confidence in those persons should it have been necessary ... to go abroad to seek capital for further developments at the mine?⁵⁷

At some interval, during the summer of 1890, a representative of the Alma Coal Company traveled to England for the purpose of floating a large loan from a bank or a private party. It is not reported whether J. F. Limerick represented the coal company or if he sent another party. However, there were those in Alma who willed the mission to fail. On August 16, Matt Thomson was denying with vehemence in the columns of the Signal, that he was the "nincompoop who spent \$27 to send a cablegram to England to prevent the Coal Company from obtaining a loan. Not me!"⁵⁸ The identity of the person or group of persons who sent that damaging cablegram, which is said to have warned that the mining operations at Alma would not be worth the risk of further development, was one of the most closely guarded secrets the town of Alma has ever known. It still has not been revealed.⁵⁹

In early August, rumors began to circulate which were soon backed up by fact, that the city council had voted to call a new bond election for \$8000. Both the Signal and the Enterprise took a dim view of voting any new bonds. So, also, did a number of the electors of the town. The Enterprise asked, querulously, "What do we need with any more bonds? We have quite enough, already." The Signal did some figuring, stating that 25 percent of Alma's present evaluation of \$133,039 would allow but \$33,259 in bonded indebtedness.

⁵⁷Ibid., May 10, 1890.

⁵⁸Ibid., Aug. 16, 1890.

⁵⁹Inquiries, by the writer, on the subject of who sent the cablegram, have brought forth suppositions that it might have been aggroup of the merchants who were jealous of Limerick's extensive enterprises; that S. H. Fairfield could have been the one; or perhaps it was Matt Thomson.

Since there was already \$42,000 not to mention the accumulated interest, how were any bonds to be allowed?⁶⁰ These queries were answered on August 30, when it was learned that the "inflated evaluation" of the Coal Company's holdings was to be evaluated at \$25,000 and added to the city's total evaluation.⁶¹ Although the city council voted to table a petition signed with 42 names remonstrating against calling the bond election, public opinion appears to have prevailed in the matter. The election was not called.⁶²

Events moved rapidly, in the fall of 1890, to the conclusion that to all too few persons, had seemed inevitable. On September 19, it was learned that the Alma Coal Company had turned over its holdings to a new company, the Park Valley Coal Company. J. F. Limerick was the president of the new company, however. The Park Valley Coal Company was apparently formed to circumvent an attachment order obtained against the Alma Coal Company in the amount of \$10,000, in order to satisfy a debt which was owed to the National Bank of Grafton, Massachusetts.⁶³ Work at the shaft had been discontinued since late August and now there appeared little hope that it could be resumed. The Fields' bondsmen, having agreed on a settlement with the Wabaunsee County Commissioners that they should pay \$10,700 of Fields' treasury deficit, now were trying to obtain \$1500 of the \$5000 equity in the property which Fields had turned over to Limerick. The creditors for materials and labor, which had gone into the Limerick bank building, were now threatening suit because of long overdue payment. Limerick was not available for comment

⁶⁰Alma Enterprise, Aug. 22, 1890; Alma Signal, Aug. 16, 1890.

⁶¹Alma Signal, August 30, 1890.

⁶²City of Alma Minute Book, C, p. 316. A search of the minutes of all of the meetings in September yielded no further mention of the bond election.

⁶³Alma Enterprise, Sept. 19, 1889; Sept. 26, 1889.

during the whole of September and most of October. He apparently was away in the East, making a last desperate attempt to save his bank and his coal company. By late October, he was back in Alma. On the 11th day of November, the First National Bank was closed.

The only one of the Limerick enterprises which had been saved from going down the drain with the bank, was the Alma Cement Works. This enterprise had been sold in the spring, and now under new management, it was in sound financial condition and had orders ahead for all the cement which 40 to 50 men could turn out.⁶⁴

During the winter and spring, many of the townspeople of Alma continued to hope that the town's financial condition might not be as desperate as reports made it appear. Although the treasury was empty, perhaps the interest was being kept up on the bonds. Perhaps, something could be recovered of the funds "lost down the coal hole." Mayor and council took one last desperate measure before the spring election. They considered a proposal to place before the voters on April 6, which asked that a special city township of Alma and vicinity be created. The purpose of this request was, of course, to create a new governmental unit which would have the power to vote some new bonds, in the amount of \$3000.⁶⁵ Apparently, the proposal was not placed on the ballot because of the pressure of adverse public opinion.

The Saturday, April 11, issue of the Signal took its rooster out of the moth balls, to crow for victory. "King Boodle is Dead!" The Signal doffed

⁶⁴Alma Signal, Nov. 15, 1890. Thomson devoted a lengthy review of the events leading to the bank failure. It appeared that much of the funds obtained from the sale of the \$25,000 in city bonds had been used in an attempt to pay off old debts owed by the bank rather than being used to further the mining venture.

⁶⁵Ibid., March 7, 1891.

its hat to ladies, paid tribute to "our German friends who stood by the right," and to the "colored troops, who fought nobly." The course of the Signal had been vindicated. The election had resulted in "a glorious victory for the people's cause and against ring rule."⁶⁶ John Limerick had not entered his name on the ballot for a sixth term as mayor. However, L. Richards, who was defeated by Henry Pauly, was reported to be Limerick's hand-picked candidate. Although an entire new city council was elected, Henry Pauly, the new mayor, had served on the old council during the past three years. He appears to have had the confidence of Alma's electors in spite of his close association with Limerick. Pauly served five years as mayor, during most of these years, being returned to office with little opposition.⁶⁷

Any hopes that the city of Alma might be able to recover any of its mis-used funds or the deposits of city funds which had been placed in the First National, were soon dispelled. Limerick was sued on all sides for recovery of funds and for debts which he had incurred, but there were no assets which could be attached, since all his holdings were mortgaged to the limit. The Park Valley addition was soon detached from the city limits and the property sold to satisfy the tax claims of the county. John Limerick and his family, most of their possessions having been attached or returned to creditors, left Alma in June of 1891 for parts unknown.⁶⁸

On May 6, the new city council faced the awful reality of the lengths to which the folly of over-optimism and blind following of unwise leadership had led the town of Alma. Suit was brought against the City of Alma to

⁶⁶Ibid., April 11, 1891.

⁶⁷City Minute Book, C, pp. 348, 398, 416, 429, 443.

⁶⁸Alma Signal, April 25, 1891; May 9, 1891; May 23, 1891; June 6, 1891.

collect \$2600 in back interest which was owed to the Guaranty Savings Bank of Manchester, New Hampshire.⁶⁹ Although Alma fought the suit through both the district court and the court of appeals, the decisions went against the city. Desperate measures appeared to be indicated in order to satisfy the judgment and the court costs of two lengthy litigations. The city council met on August 24, 1894, to consider the means of raising the needed funds. Seeing no other alternative, a levy of 27 mills was added to the already heavy city levy of 26½ mills. At the cry of protest which rose from the unhappy taxpayers, a special meeting was called a month later to rescind the new levy.⁷⁰ Through the following decade, Alma's successive mayors and city councils worried over the problem of how to bring the city out of its morass of debt, meanwhile ignoring all efforts of its creditors to collect any of the interest due or any portion of the principal of the \$25,000 debt. Small payments continued to be made on the earlier bonds, but through the years the total debt increased.

During the period of moderate prosperity which both rural and urban areas entered in the early years of the 1900's, Alma finally was able to arrange a settlement with its creditors which enabled its debt to be gradually paid. In 1904, Ferdinand Stuewe was sent to Chicago to negotiate with the holders of Alma's bonds, in an effort to effect a reduction in the \$46,000 debt, which had accumulated in the 15-year period since 1889. Stuewe obtained a highly satisfactory reduction, Alma's creditors agreeing to reduce the amount of the debt to \$29,000. A refunding bond issue was then willingly voted by Alma's citizens, in order that the debt might be paid.⁷¹

⁶⁹Ibid., May 9, 1891.

⁷⁰City Minute Book, C, pp. 435-437

⁷¹City of Alma Bond Record, pp. 4-6. (Dec. 1, 1904)

In spite of financial set-backs for the town Alma grew moderately during the 1890's and early 1900's. In 1890, Alma's population had reached 957 but the following year, with the departure of the transient workers and other employees of the Limerick enterprises, the figure had fallen to 875. However, the magic figure of 1000 was reached in 1892. The years, 1897-1899, found the residents of Alma numbered nearly 1080 persons. Its population figure remained above 1020 until 1901 but it fluctuated between 900 and 1000 persons during all of the first decade of the Twentieth Century.⁷² Not until the 1930's did Alma's population decline to the present day figure of less than 800.

In the first decade following the turn of the century, the small City of Alma, Kansas, took pride in acquiring modern conveniences, and in its up to date appearance. Its residents were provided with a telephone system and electric lights. By 1905, new cement walks had been laid on Missouri Street and a number of old board sidewalks in the residential districts were being replaced with cement or brick walks.

Elizabeth N. Barr, in 1907, wrote this description.

Alma is the only town in the county that can put on enough metropolitan airs to have an automobile parade every evening. From the standpoint of appearance, it is one of the most pleasing towns in Kansas. It is well kept and neat. Missouri street is kept in good repair and lined with nice looking business blocks of native stone. There is an uniformity and grace about the town which is good to see. As well as being progressive and enterprising, the people of Alma are so friendly and pleasant to meet that a stranger at once feels at home among them.⁷³

⁷²State Board of Agriculture, Biennial Reports, 1889-1910.

⁷³Elizabeth N. Barr, Wabaunsee County Directory and History, pp. 41-42.

CHAPTER V. CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ALMA COMMUNITY

Early in the period when the first school districts were organized in Wabaunsee County, two districts were formed in Alma Township in 1860.¹ It was one thing, however, to take an early interest in the organization of a school district and quite another matter to get a building constructed and a district school in operation. More urgent matters than the building of schools and the hiring of teachers, provided a teacher could be obtained who was willing to teach for the little money offered, claimed the attention and energies of the settlers during the harrowing years of drought and war. In the Templin district, in the western part of Alma Township, the building of a stone fort for the purpose of defense against feared Indian raids took precedence over the construction of a schoolhouse until 1865.² Teachers were so scarce and so poorly paid that it was not unusual to find one teacher employed by two or three different districts during the year to conduct a three-month term of school in each. In the early 1860's, young women teachers were offered from eight to ten dollars per month to come out into the remote school districts of Wabaunsee County and teach under very primitive conditions. Men teachers were offered double the salary paid to women but at most might receive \$25 per month.³ At Wabaunsee, where a longer school term was held than in most other districts during the early years, it was the usual custom to employ a man to teach the first three-month term of school,

¹Public School Record, Wabaunsee County, Vol. I, pp. 7-8. This old Record, on file in the office of the County Superintendent of Schools at Alma, offers a gold mine of information on the early district schools.

²Thomson, op. cit., p. 58.

³Public School Record, I, pp. 26-29. Information from school reports.

paying the top price, and then to secure the services of a woman teacher for the second term at less than half the salary paid to the man. It was fortunate that Wabaunsee village had been settled by New Englanders with good education for otherwise the supply of teachers for the district schools of Wabaunsee County would have been almost nil during the war years.⁴ Wilmington and Wabaunsee, whose settlers had New England backgrounds, led the way in county school affairs for a number of years. The German settlers of Alma Township were slower in starting their schools, but two of the four districts managed to hold a term of school in 1863.⁵

By August of 1862, fifteen school districts had been formed in Wabaunsee County and it became evident that a county-wide district numbering system would be needed to replace the initial practice of numbering the districts in one-two-three order in each township. Accordingly, on August 19, 1862, the County Superintendent, J. H. Gould, set up a county-wide numbering system for the previously formed districts. Districts No. 1 and No. 2 in Alma Township were combined into one very large district which was designated as District No. 8. The other districts which had been organized in this township were designated as No. 9, No. 10, and No. 14.⁶ In the spring of 1863, District 9 secured Miss Emma Bisby to teach a three-month term of school at a salary of eight dollars per month. District 14 also got under way later in 1863, with G. B. Woostrow conducting four months of school for the sum of \$78. His 17 pupils were considered very fortunate to be taught by Woostrow, whose services were much in demand. The following year, both of these

⁴Kansas Annual Register, 1864, p. 213.

⁵Public School Record, 1, p. 28.

⁶Ibid., p. 16.

teachers received small increases in salary as an inducement to return to these remote district schools. Early in 1864, District 8 completed the construction of a log schoolhouse which was claimed to be among the finest in the county. It was valued at \$200 which was top value for a log building at that time.⁷ Woostrow, who had just closed a three-month school term at District 14, was employed to teach the first term of school at District 8. The new school was located in the southern half of the far-flung district, on the farm of Peter Thoes, who had given the grounds for the school.

The children of five families, living in the north half of District 8, found the distance from their homes to the school too great to attend school very often. In fact, most of them did not attend at all. On June 19, 1865, the County Superintendent, Isiah Harris honored a petition for the formation of a new school district from the north half of District 8. Petitioning for the new school district, in order that their 14 children might be provided with a school convenient to their homes, were Gottlieb Zwanziger, Frederick Palenske, John T. Mahan, Franz Schmidt, and Philip Litz. The new district was designated as District No. 16.⁸ It was formed from the north half of District 8 and in addition received a strip of land on the west from District No. 9 and a further addition at the north from No. 3.⁹ This was approximately the original area of the old Alma District 1 which had been formed on the petition of Zwanziger and others in 1860. Thus it is considered that District 16, which was soon known as Alma District 16, had its origin in 1860.

It seems probable that Zwanziger and his neighbors, whose farms lay

⁷Ibid., p. 29.

⁸Ibid., p. 31.

⁹Ibid., p. 31.

along the western edge of the Pottawatomie Indian Reserve, anticipated two important future developments when they petitioned that their new school district encompass the area which extended six miles to the west of the Pottawatomie Reserve, and which extended northward from the southwest corner of the Reserve to the southern boundary of Wabaunsee Township. Within this 30-square-mile school district was situated the 40-acre tract which had been reserved by Zwanziger in 1857 as a future townsite. By the summer of 1865, Zwanziger had found a young German settler who shared his dream of founding a town on the site near the Mill Creek junction. Henry Schmitz began his mission of "stirring up the valley settlers" to support his effort to locate "the Capital of Wabaunsee County" in the heart of the Mill Creek valley, in the fall of 1865.¹⁰ The other anticipated development was the opening of the Pottawatomie Reserve to white settlement. Settlers would pour in to claim the fertile land in the lower Mill Creek valley, once the Indians were removed to new reserves. Although anticipated as early as 1864, the opening of the Reserve lands did not come until 1868, and not until 1870, after most of the Indians had departed for new homes, did many settlers come.¹¹ As had been expected, the village of Alma profited from the filling of the Reserve with white settlers and became the trade center for the whole of the Mill Creek area. District 16 became a prosperous district with a rapidly increasing school population, which, in the ensuing years, usually burst the seams of the old school building before a new and more commodious building would be provided.

¹⁰Sec Chapter III, p. 48.

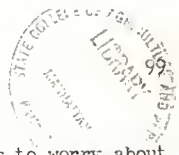
¹¹Thomson, op. cit., p. 12

District 16 experienced considerable delay in opening a school, as had its predecessors. Two years passed during which the energies of many of its residents were directed toward winning the permanent location of the county seat for the newly founded town of Alma, and then toward getting a few building and business projects going in the town. No families came to dwell within the town until the fall of 1867, but in the spring of that year the District 16 School Board had decided that it was high time to begin the operation of a school. Henry Schmitz, August Meyer, and H. Hensel were the three school directors. They took time out from business and town affairs to find a teacher, J. H. Rush, who consented to teach four months of school in Alma at \$47 per month.¹² It was to be the custom for many years in the town of Alma to pay top salaries in order to secure a well qualified, and preferably, a male teacher. Schmitz and Meyer, town founders, the town's first and for many years the town's leading merchants, were also on the village council. They had seen to the construction of the Kaufman Building, which housed the County offices and the County Court and also the Schmitz and Meyer store. It was but a logical development, that the first school to be held in Alma was held in the Court Room, "on days when Court was not in session."¹³

The Alma School reported an enrollment of 35 for the year of 1867, but its average daily attendance was only 12. This was a pattern in attendance that held for many years in most of the district schools of the county. It was also part of the pattern that early in the term, before spring planting time began, the older boys and several of the young men enrolled in school.

¹²Public School Record, I, pp. 64-65.

¹³Palenske, "autobiography," op. cit., p. 4.



In the ungraded schools of that day, there were no promotions to worry about and a little "book learning" was to be acquired how and when one could. The "old timers" delight in telling how it was always in fashion for the big boys to attend school early in the term to see what might be expected from the new teacher. They "tested out the teacher" to see if he would stand for any "tomfoolery." If not, then the interest of the usual variety of overgrown scholar was likely to be ended and so was his attendance for the term. For the few older teen-age pupils who persisted in attendance after they had finished the usual district school courses, there were some teachers who were qualified to offer a little Latin, algebra, and some advanced grammar and literature. Since there were no organized high schools in Wabunsee County prior to 1900, these "advanced courses" substituted for high school and usually prepared a number of students to enter the colleges of that day. However, this was not the usual pattern in the early years of the Alma schools since one teacher often had from 35 to 50 pupils. After two or more teachers were hired and there was a principal who taught the "Grammar Department," advanced courses were offered for the older students who demanded them.¹⁴

District 16 held two terms of school in the Kaufman Building and then voted \$1000 in bonds on April 1, 1869, for the purpose of constructing a frame schoolhouse, 20 feet by 35 feet.¹⁵ The new building was ready for the beginning of a five-month term of school in the early summer. Carl Lang taught 35 pupils and received the top salary being paid in the county of

¹⁴Interview with Mrs. E. M. Carroll, who recalled her early school days in Alma in the 1830's and who remembers the "tales" told of the earlier schools. Mrs. Carroll also furnished information on the churches and social affairs.

¹⁵Thomson, op. cit., p. 65.

\$50 per month. The new school building and the "educational advantages" to be had in the Alma Public School received some praise from the editor of the Herald on April 22, when he noted that

A new and commodious schoolhouse is soon to be ready which will have the new patent seats and will offer educational opportunities for forty to sixty scholars.... Alma employs a teacher by the year who is thoroughly competent in all the branches taught by a first-class school.¹⁶

However, the Alma school ran into trouble early in the year of 1870 and was not able to complete its winter term of school. Carl Lang had not been persuaded to return even at an offer of \$55 per month. In December, Eric Gardner was employed for the three-month term. All seemed to be going well with the school when suddenly, a very sour note entered the Herald's items:

Eric Gardner, the new teacher at the Alma School, is reported to have left town with no notice to anyone. He borrowed, without permission, a Colt Revolver belonging to S. H. Fairfield and a watch belonging to Adolph Zeckser. It is said that he owed \$60 in bills.¹⁷

The school situation failed to improve before time for the spring school election and Editor Fairfield felt it necessary to take a firm tone with the Alma patrons. On March 17, in an editorial entitled, "Our School," the editor demanded concerted action from the school patrons in order to elect a new set of school officers who would put school interests ahead of all other considerations. "Alma must have a full term of school, this year," wrote Fairfield, chiding his readers with the reminder that very soon a number of the children in the Alma district would be grown and not have spent very many weeks in the schoolroom. He went on to set forth the qualifications of a good teacher, suggesting to the school board that it might be well for the

¹⁶Wabaunsee County Herald, April 22, 1869.

¹⁷Ibid., January 6, 1870.

applicant to submit to an examination before that body as well as to present a certificate showing that he had passed the County Superintendent's examining board.¹⁸ How effective the Fairfield editorial was, is not recorded. In any case, the patrons of the Alma School did turn out at the school election and elected three new school officials. The new Clerk of the Board was a man long tried and true in school matters, Gottlieb Zwanziger. Ab. Sellers, partner of Fairfield in the newspaper business, was elected as Director and Chris. Dieball as Treasurer. The new Board saw to the hiring of a teacher, immediately, and had a new term of school opened within two weeks.¹⁹ It was not long until Zwanziger called at the Herald office to lead Editor Fairfield by the hand over to the school, that he might note its progress. Twice during the spring term the Herald reported, "The Alma School was visited by the editor this week and we are happy to report a school well kept and progress being made."²⁰

From the year, 1870, Alma school affairs were important in the life of the town but the attitude of the school patrons toward providing adequate building facilities was always to remain conservative. The school population continued to grow much faster than new buildings were provided. By 1874, the frame building which had seemed so commodious in 1869, was badly overcrowded. It is estimated that 70 or more pupils crowded the building which, at most, was designed to seat 60 persons. In another year's time the census figures for District 16 showed that there were 177 persons of school age (5 to 21 years) as compared to 111 persons in 1874. The school enrollment

¹⁸Ibid., March 17, 1870.

¹⁹Ibid., April 7, 1870.

²⁰Ibid., May 5, 1870; Aug. 25, 1870.

would have been about two-thirds of the census figure with the average daily attendance estimated at about 60 percent of the enrollment.²¹ The new building, which was finished late in 1874, came none too soon.

On June 1, 1874, District 16 held a bond election which resulted in a \$5000 bond issue for the purpose of constructing a two-story stone school building of the dimensions of 40 feet by 40 feet.²² Construction was pushed on the new building all through the summer and fall of 1874. On January 18, 1875, the teachers and students of the Alma School marched proudly into the new building.²³ The three-classroom building, spacious at the time, was outgrown in less than ten years, yet it was made to serve the District 16 pupils for over 30 years.

The new stone schoolhouse stood stark and lonely on a high hill overlooking the town of Alma from the northwest. Its grounds were spacious but devoid of trees or shrubs. Thus they remained for many years despite the repeated pleas of newspaper editors and county superintendents that the grounds should be enclosed and beautified through the planting of trees and shrubs. As the school enrollment climbed, the School Board of District 16 saw fit to solve the problem of providing additional classrooms through the renting of "temporary buildings." Until the stone building became overcrowded, however, the two first floor classrooms served both the Primary and the Intermediate departments while the large room occupying the entire second floor was the Grammar department, called the "Principal's Room." The Alma School was not

²¹Public School Record, A, pp. 318, 371. Estimations of enrollment and average attendance made by comparing ratios of figures in county reports.

²²Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

²³Wabauensee County News, January 22, 1875.

graded until 1890 when County Superintendent W. W. Raney saw to the grading of all the schools in the county for the first time.²⁴

As boom times came to Alma in the 1820's and new and handsome stone business blocks were being built by some of the town's enterprising citizens, the building of a new schoolhouse was agitated. However, a few rural voters would have approved bonds for such a project in that period of increasing hard times for the farmer, nor would the conservative element in Alma have supported it.

One factor which operated to help prevent Alma's public school enrollment from completely overflowing the limited space which was provided during a period of 30 years, was that two parochial schools were maintained. In 1873, the first resident Lutheran pastor, H. C. Senne, began a small Lutheran school. Within a few years, a regular teacher was employed and the enrollment at the one-room Lutheran School grew slowly. A two-story stone building was erected for school purposes in 1890, which attracted a larger enrollment. The largest classes at the Lutheran School were in the upper grades, since it is necessary that boys and girls between the ages of 12 to 14 years be given daily religious instruction in addition to regular school subjects, preparatory to Confirmation.²⁵ Thus the congestion in the Principal's Room at the Alma Public School was relieved by the Lutheran upper grades enrollment.²⁶ The Catholic Church began a parochial school in 1880, which was maintained

²⁴Wabaunsee County Directory and History, 1907, p. 14.

²⁵St. John's Lutheran Church, Alma, Kansas, "Seventy-fifth Anniversary, 1870-1945" (Alma: 1945), pp. 10-13. A brief historical sketch of the church is included.

²⁶Assumed from present comparative Lutheran and Public School enrollments in present day periods.

until sometime between 1905-08.²⁷ It appears, however, that this school's enrollment was never very large.

Interest was shown in starting a high school in Alma, several years before Alma High School had its modest beginning in 1900.²⁸ There were the problems of providing the additional classroom space for high school classes and of securing a qualified teacher who might also act as school principal. By 1895, the public school enrollment had reached 272, with the average daily attendance from 160 to 180 pupils. Five teachers were employed and a temporary building was rented which provided two classrooms in addition to the three classrooms in the stone schoolhouse.²⁹ The seventh and eighth grades continued to occupy the Principal's Room on the second floor, while the two classrooms on the first floor accommodated the four intermediate grades. The two primary grades, with a teacher for each, were housed in the temporary building.³⁰

Alma High School made its initial appearance in a cautious fashion on September 10, 1900. David E. Lang served as principal and teacher of high school subjects to a ninth grade (freshman) class and also taught a few of the eighth grade subjects. A second teacher taught most of the subjects in the seventh and eighth grades. An extra classroom was provided as a high school recitation room by partitioning the large top-floor room. The larger room served as a study hall for all the 35 students enrolled in the three

²⁷Scrapbook of Catholic Churches in Kansas; newspaper clipping on the history of the Holy Family Parish of Alma, Kansas. On file at Church Rectory.

²⁸Alma High School Register, I, 1900-1908, pp. 1-2.

²⁹Annual Report of District Clerk, School District No. 16, 1895. On file in the County Superintendent's office, Court House, Alma, Kansas.

³⁰Ibid., the last page of the report gives number of classrooms, etc.

grades and was also used for the seventh and eighth grade recitation room.³¹ It is not clear from the records of the first two years of high school how many students were counted as enrolled in high school. A second year of the high school course was added in the fall of 1901.³²

In the fall of 1902, S. D. (Sol.) Dice began a three-year tenure as the high school principal and sole teacher of high school subjects. Dice continued the two-year high school course until the fall of 1904, when he added a third year of high school and prepared a class of six "Eleventh-year Seniors" for the first graduation to be held at Alma High School, on May 14, 1905.³³ Dice saw more than 50 years of service in Kansas school affairs.... For many years, he was the High School Supervisor for the State Department of Education, retiring in 1954. On May 18, 1955, Sol. Dice returned to Alma to sit on the platform as the guest of honor at the 50th anniversary graduation exercises of the Alma High School.³⁴

The fourth year of the high school course was added in the fall of 1905 and one student, Dewitt Kinne, had the honor of being the first four-year graduate.³⁵ The year, 1906-1907, was a red-letter school year for Alma High School. The three students enrolled in the Senior class looked forward to their May graduation exercises in the auditorium of a fine, new high school building. In 1905, \$11,000 in bonds were voted for the purpose of constructing

³¹Interview with Oscar and Freda Nelson who were students during the first few years of Alma High School. Oscar Nelson was one of the three members of the first senior class to be graduated from the new high school building, May, 1907.

³²High School Register, I, op. cit., pp. 1-4; 23.

³³Ibid., pp. 5-10; 24-27.

³⁴Interview with Supt. J. C. Edwards of Alma. Sol. Dice enjoyed recounting his early school years in Alma.

³⁵High School Register, I, pp. 11-12; 27-28.

a large two-story-and-a-half school building of the celebrated Alma limestone.³⁶ When finished in May of 1907, Alma High School boasted the most magnificent and commodious, school building in the county. This building, however, was made to accommodate both the high school and grade school pupils for more than 20 years. Four large classrooms on the first floor were reserved for the eight grades of the elementary school. Three classrooms and a large combination study hall and auditorium, on the second floor, served the high school. It was soon necessary to complete additional classrooms for high school use. The attic half-story room, large and comfortable with its dormer windows on every side, became the "Domestic Arts" (cooking and sewing) classroom for the girls' classes while two rooms were provided for the boys' shop courses in the basement.³⁷ The high school staff which began in the new building was composed of three teachers, two of these being the Superintendent of Schools and the High School Principal. A fourth teacher was added in 1908.³⁸ Probably, no one foresaw that the high school enrollment would more than double in two years' time. In the spring of 1907 there was an enrollment of 40 high school students, but by the spring of 1909 the enrollment had reached 83. The elementary grades enrolled well over 200 pupils each year.³⁹ The fine new high school building was almost immediately overcrowded but after 1910, various factors operated to reduce the public school enrollment, slightly.

Alma, District 16, continued its conservative program for its schools

³⁶School Bond Record Book, p. 24. On file at County Clerk's office.

³⁷Interview with Mrs. Freda Nelson, graduate in the Class of 1908.

³⁸High School Register, I, pp. 17-21; 31-32.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 29-30; 31-32; District 16 Annual Reports, 1895-1910.

through good times and bad. As the town, after World War I, offered fewer business and industrial opportunities to its young population, a great many sought opportunities of livelihood elsewhere. Alma became, and still is, a retired farmers' town. Thus the tendency toward conservatism in support of all public expenditure increased. The school was never neglected but it was allowed to "make-do" in many departments. The most active support on the part of the Alma patrons of school activities always was given to programs of school entertainment but especially to the athletic programs. Alma boys preferred the honor of the large "A" on the athletic sweater to the academic "A" on the report card. However, a reasonable standard of scholarship was encouraged by the parents and exacted by the teachers.

Alma provided a new and quite adequate high school building in 1928 which has a large auditorium and also a standard sized gymnasium. The elementary scholars continued to use the old building until a fine new elementary school building was completed during 1955. A Superintendent of Schools is employed who also acts as the high school principal and teaches one or more subjects in the high school. In addition, there are seven other instructors on the high school staff. Vocational agriculture, with a well equipped farm shop, is offered and well patronized by the school students, more than half of whom come from the rural areas. A full time music teacher is employed. There are two coaches, one who teaches the commercial subjects and the other who teaches Physical Education and Health classes. The present day high school enrollment remains near 100. A Rural High School District is in the process of organization this year and when completed it will draw from a larger area than the present already very large district. The elementary school's enrollment usually exceeds 110 and is slowly growing. The recent

completion of an excellent new Lutheran School building has increased that school's enrollment somewhat at the expense of the public school, especially in the upper grades. The elementary school has a staff of eight teachers, the principal teaching the eighth grade.⁴⁰

The people of the Alma community turned their attention to the organization of churches as well as to the establishment of schools at an early date. Before there had been talk of a town on Mill Creek, a pioneer Lutheran minister, Pastor F. Lange, was sent to a point near Junction City, Kansas, to begin his work as the first resident Lutheran pastor in the state. An exploration trip into the Mill Creek valley led Pastor Lange to establish two "mission stations" on upper Mill Creek in 1861. One of these was near the site of Alma and the other on West Branch near the point called Templin. These stations were served by various traveling Lutheran missionaries until they were discontinued in 1865. The Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church sent its first resident pastor to Alma in 1869, he being the first resident pastor of any church to come to the town.⁴¹ Other churches sent itinerant ministers to serve the Alma community for several years before any church was organized in Alma. During the summer of 1869, Rev. Father Remelee, a Jesuit, held monthly services at the homes of some of the Catholic settlers and later alternated with some of the other churches in holding Sunday services in the Court room of the Kaufman building. The Methodists established a regular monthly service on Hendricks Creek which was held by their circuit ministers. On December 12, 1869, the first preaching service in Alma to be conducted in English was held by the Rev. Mr. Tunnel, pastor of the

⁴⁰Interview with J. C. Edwards, present Superintendent of Schools.

⁴¹St. John's Lutheran Church, op. cit., p. 3.

Congregational Church of Christ at Wabauensee. The Rev. Harvey Jones, Congregational Home Missionary, also held services in Alma several times during the following year or sent another pastor in his stead.⁴²

By the summer of 1870, three of the five church organizations which were to be established permanently in Alma had sent resident ministers to the town. Pastor H. C. Senne arrived in Alma in the summer of 1869 and began the organization of a congregation on upper Mill Creek that later merged with the organization which became the St. John's Lutheran Church of Alma, in 1870. The Lutheran congregation was the first to erect a church building in Alma, completing a framebuilding in March of 1873, which served both as a house of worship and a Christian Day School. The Lutheran Church erected its first stone building in 1879, which served a rapidly growing congregation until the present beautiful, costly, and very handsomely furnished church building was completed in 1907.⁴³ The Lutheran Church, today, boasts the largest congregation in Alma, serving a wide area through the Mill Creek valley. For many years services were held only in German, and then the custom prevailed for a number of years of holding both English and German services in the church. Now that the German-born church members have passed on, the services are in English but for nearly 50 years the Lutheran Church of Alma called itself "St. Johannes' German Lutheran Church of Alma."⁴⁴

The Catholics organized the second church congregation in Alma although they were not to be served by a resident minister until 1880. Rev. Father

⁴²A History of the First Congregational Church of Christ, "Quarter Centennial Anniversary" (Alma: 1900), pp. 3-6.

⁴³St. John's Lutheran Church, op. cit., pp. 3-5.

⁴⁴Interview with Pastor R. H. Raedke of St. John's Lutheran Church, Alma.

Remelee, the Jesuit Missionary from the Mission station at St. Mary's, started a fund for the erection of a Catholic Church for the Holy Family Parish of Alma by raising \$400 at a picnic in the summer of 1870. The Catholic congregation was small but its members worked hard during the next three years to raise the money for the erection of a frame building, in 1874. The Alma Parish also built a rectory soon after this, hoping that a resident pastor would be sent to Alma. Father Hundhausen did not arrive until 1880, but when he began his ministry the Church grew rapidly. The frame church building was destroyed by fire in February, 1899. Encouraged by the Rev. Father Kamp, the Holy Family Parish began, immediately, the construction of a new building of the native Alma stone which, when completed in November of 1899, was the pride of the parish, with its spacious, beautifully furnished and decorated interior, its numerous stained glass windows, and its richly appointed altar. The Catholic people of Alma, never among those counted as the most prosperous of the townspeople, always worked long and hard to support all their church projects. Within a few years they had cleared the considerable debt which was incurred on their new building. In 1921 the parish replaced the old rectory with a spacious two-story rectory faced with buff stucco to harmonize with the native stone of the church.⁴⁵

The third church organization to be made by a group of the German folk of the Alma community was the last of the five Alma churches to be chartered. The German Evangelical Church was called the "Peace Evangelical and Reformed Church of Alma" and was, usually, simply called the "Peace Church." Under

⁴⁵Scrap Book of Kansas Catholic History; newspaper clippings among which is a brief sketch of the Holy Family Parish at Alma; filed in rectory library.

the leadership of Rev. C. Kraft, who served both the Wells Creek and the Alma charges, the Peace Church of Alma was organized in 1879 with Gottlieb Zwanziger, Anton Schewe, John Schwanke, Adolph Zockser, Frederick Thowe, F. G. Nehring, August Beutel, John Ringel, Gottlieb Noller, G. A. Hankammer, Peter Lang, and several others as charter members. The work of erecting a church building, a simple but spacious stone edifice, was completed in 1881 with August Beutel and Peter Lang in charge.⁴⁶ In 1897, the appearance of the Peace Church was much enhanced through the addition of a vestibule and Gothic towering spire that housed a deep-toned bell, both of which were the generous gifts of Johann and Maria Klockman.⁴⁷ Today, the Peace Church of Alma is a thriving one with a membership second only to that of the Lutheran Church. Next door to the church is a parish hall used for numerous social occasions and adjacent to the hall is the parsonage.

During the early decades in the affairs of the people of the Alma community, there was a sharp distinction between the people of German nativity and those of Anglo-American heritage. This was never more clearly defined than in their church affiliations. The two churches which were organized by the latter group of persons were the Methodist and the Congregational churches. Again there was a distinction stemming from the backgrounds of the charter members of these churches. Most of the "New Englanders" of Alma had come first to Wabauensee and the Congregational Church was a part of that New England heritage. The Methodists were a more heterogeneous group with most of their members coming from such states as Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.

⁴⁶Peace Evangelical and Reformed Church, Sixtieth Anniversary, "Souvenir Program," 1879-1939, pp. 1-4. It contains a brief historical sketch.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 1-4.

Each of these churches was organized with a very small membership and proceeded with building plans and church programs in spite of sharply limited means. However, the two groups made up in zeal and self-sacrifice what might have been lacked in membership and worldly goods.⁴⁸

After the year of initial missionary efforts among the Alma people by such circuit riders as the Rev. McNair, in 1869-1870, there seems to have been a period of two years when no Methodist services were held in Alma. Sometime in 1873 new efforts began to be made in behalf of organizing a Methodist Church in Alma. In 1877, the Methodist congregation bought a parsonage and in 1878 came the minister, Rev. G. E. Nicholson, who was soon termed "the church builder" by his grateful congregation for his efforts in behalf of building the Alma Methodist Church. C. N. Rose, devout Methodist layman and able carpenter, spearheaded the drive for funds to begin the construction of the building and was foreman of the project. A frame building of simple design with narrow, pointed gothic-arched windows and a slender belfry atop the roof, which boasted the first church bell in Alma, was dedicated by the Methodist congregation before the end of the year, 1878. The Methodist people never felt able to construct a spacious stone edifice such as the three German churches had achieved by the early 1900's, but in 1906, they remodeled their building by extending the seating capacity of the auditorium through an addition on the north and added three large stained glass windows, an altar alcove, and an entrance hall topped by a belfry tower.⁴⁹ Today, the Alma Methodist Church has the smallest membership of any of the

⁴⁸Interview with Mrs. C. E. Carroll, a member of the Alma Methodist Church for 73 years.

⁴⁹Interview with Mrs. C. E. Carroll.

four churches of the town, and finds it hard to finance its church programs. It shares its minister with two other churches of small congregations in nearby towns and thus it is able to keep from closing its doors for lack of means to support a full time minister. For a number of years the Methodist minister of the "Alma Charge" has had to be a circuit rider as of old, though his "trusty steed" is of the four-wheeled, gasoline-propelled variety. Every Sabbath through 50 weeks of the year, the minister holds three services, traveling to Paxiso for a 9 o'clock service, returning to Alma to hold an 11 o'clock service, and journeying over to McFarland for an evening service. Of course there are week-day duties which also take him back to each of these charges. Small wonder the mid-week prayer meeting was discontinued.⁵⁰

Six of the charter members of the First Congregational Church of Christ, which was formally chartered by a Congregational church council in Alma on April 30, 1875, had also been charter members of the Congregational Church at Wabaunsee. S. H. Fairfield and his wife led the way in the organization of the Alma Congregational Church as they always were to lead in the affairs of this little church through fully 40 years of its 65 years of duration. It is notable that of the six members who were received into the church that day on profession of faith, three of these were daughters of Fairfield and that his oldest daughter was among the group transferring membership from the Wabaunsee Church. Thus, six of the 14 charter members of the Alma Congregational Church were Fairfields, the whole of this family.⁵¹

The initial effort at establishing a Sunday School in Alma had been the

⁵⁰Interview with Mrs. C. F. Carroll.

⁵¹History of the Congregational Church of Alma, pp. 5-6.

result of the early missionary work of the Congregational missions, sent to Alma in 1869. Since this was an "English" project, it lapsed for lack of sufficient enrollment of scholars. A German Baptist missionary, Rev. Zeckser, unsuccessful in his attempt to organize a German Baptist congregation, united with Fairfield and J. T. Keagy in the organization of a German-English Sunday School in August of 1871, which soon was called the Alma Union Sunday School.⁵² This effort received the support of most of the religious groups in Alma for several years and was well attended by both German and English scholars. The Union Sunday School flourished for ten years under the enthusiastic sponsorship of Fairfield. With the organization of the Methodist, Evangelical, and Catholic churches, membership in the Union School fell off rapidly. It was reluctantly disbanded by "Deacon Fairfield" who then turned his attention to seeing that the Congregational Sunday School became a going concern. Fairfield never relaxed his interest in the Sunday School. In 1915, when he was approaching the end of his long and useful life, he signified that his interest had not flagged through the gift of \$1000 toward the completion of an addition to the church structure of a large room for the use of the Sunday School. Appropriately, the new Sunday School Room was dedicated as the "Fairfield Memorial."⁵³

The small congregation of the Alma Congregational Church early aspired to the erection of a church building but its dream was not to become reality until 1881. Only through the generous aid given by the Congregational Home Missionary Society was the Alma church enabled to retain the services of a

⁵²Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁵³"Dedication Program" of First Congregational Church, Alma, Kan., 1915.

part-time minister in those early years and when the church building project was proposed, the Home Missionary Society helped to raise the funds. The church building which was dedicated on August 28, 1881, was a frame structure of simple New England style. Many friends of the new church from the Congregational churches of Manhattan, Wabaunsee, Wamego, Topeka, and Junction City, attended the dedicatory services which lasted all through the day and well into the evening. Such was the enthusiasm engendered at the meeting that pledges were made to clear the remaining debt of \$400 on the building and a gift of \$125 was made for the purchase of a large bell.⁵⁴

In spite of their proud occupancy of a debt-free church structure, the members of the Congregational Church did not find their pathway easy. The "Revival Years" of 1877-1878 had briefly increased the church membership but there was little of permanent gain from these new converts. Most of them drifted away during the period of reaction which followed the revival enthusiasm. It has been suggested that the efforts of some of the deacons of the church to regulate the morals and behavior of its new converts in the good old-fashioned manner of their New England Puritan ancestors was not to be tolerated by the more easy going frontier people. Certainly the German element of the town resented the successful efforts of both the Methodists and the Congregationalists at founding temperance societies, which resulted in getting the dram shops closed on Sunday.⁵⁵

During the decades of the late 19th century and the early 20th century, the Congregational Church made a moderate growth and was able to sustain its

⁵⁴History of First Congregational Church, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 8-10.

work without the aid of the Home Missionary Society. In 1915, when the Sunday School room was added to the church, its members still looked forward to a bright future for their church. But the fortunes of the Congregational Church were bound up with those of the New Englanders of the town and with the fortunes of their descendants. After World War I, Alma offered little in the way of business or professional opportunities to induce the ambitious "Yankees" to remain. The "old settlers" of the period of Alma's exuberant youth had passed on and their sons preferred to seek their means of livelihood in metropolitan areas. In a large measure, it can be considered that the passing of S. H. Fairfield from the Alma scene in 1917, influential leader in his church for 40 years and a foremost leader in the affairs of the town for over 50 years, not only marked the beginning of the decline of the Congregational Church but also marked the end of the period which might be termed, "Alma's youth." In 1936, the Alma Congregational Church of Christ was forced to close its doors for lack of membership.⁵⁶

The first society for cultural improvement, which was organized in Alma, was a debating society. On August 12, 1869, the Herald reported that the Alma Debating Society had been organized on August 11, with Henry Schmitz as chairman and N. H. Whittemore as secretary. Schmitz was quoted as saying,

The purpose of the society is to familiarize its members with public debate which is something that is essential to all. Every man should be able to express his thoughts in public assemblage and therefore the object of the society is to cultivate a spirit for public speaking.⁵⁷

It is not recorded how long the Debating Society remained active. In those

⁵⁶Interview with Mrs. Laura Stuewe who participated in the closing of the Congregational Church in Alma and in the disposal of its property.

⁵⁷Wabaunsee County Herald, Aug. 12, 1869.

early years, the young ladies of the town took no part in such activities. However, in 1885, the Alma Literary Society was organized with a membership which included both sexes. Its programs included spirited debates in addition to literary and musical selections.⁵⁸

School, church, and all other civic groups sponsored programs which featured fare designed for entertainment as well as for cultural improvement. The women's societies of the churches were frequently engaged in activities which were for the purpose of filling the church coffers while providing cultural uplift for its members. Music stood high in the public favor on all occasions but it was especially loved by the German folk. Singing societies, bands, and orchestra groups were organized by early church and town groups and remained well patronized until the motor age of the 1920's enticed the younger people to seek entertainment in neighboring, larger towns. Parties and picnics were always, and still are, popular among the people of the Alma community.

A singing society, which remained popular among the Alma Germans for more than three decades, was the Alma Liederkrantz, organized in 1890.⁵⁹ It was organized by a group of German Catholic men who welcomed and were joined by many of their friends of other faiths who loved to sing. The Liederdrantz grew so fast that it soon had a waiting list. The society purchased a four-acre tract of land near the town upon which it erected a building at a cost of \$400, in 1893. By 1900, its membership was 125 and its songfests were popular features with the picnic crowds which gathered often at Liederkrantz Park. Through the years the park was the scene of numerous picnics, parties,

⁵⁸Alma Enterprise, Aug. 29, 1885.

⁵⁹Thomson, op. cit., p. 355.

dances, and other entertainment activities.⁶⁰

Brass bands and string bands were popular organizations in Wabaunsee County for many years. Every town had its "Volunteer Band" which was called upon to supply the music and a festive air at gala gatherings. The most elaborate entertainment project of the year was the celebration of "The Glorious Fourth." Alma, as the County Seat town, usually held an all day celebration, with neighboring towns and communities invited to bring their bands. Each band prided itself upon its splendid array of band uniforms and a gay bandwagon which transported its members.⁶¹ There was always the well-known public speaker who vied for the attention of the crowd with two baseball games, a merry-go-round, fireworks, pink lemonade, red soda pop, five flavors of ice-cream, well-filled picnic baskets, and the music of five or six bands. The newspapers advertised in large black type:

COME ONE! COME ALL!

GLORIOUS FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION

ALMA, KANSAS

BASEBALL, FIREWORKS, MERRY-GO-ROUND, FINE SPEAKING, FINE BANDS

COME AND HEAR THE EAGLE SCREAM!⁶²

In later years the Alma Band became a community supported organization. After World War I, when Alma High School began to employ a band instructor, it became the custom for the boys and girls, who had been trained in the school band, to join their elders for a program of summer band concerts. The band instructor was employed on a part-time basis, the concert patrons making

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 355.

⁶¹Alma Enterprise, June 22, 1887.

⁶²Alma Signal, June 29, 1906.

up his salary through subscriptions, to train the band through the summer. The band concerts were given in the City Park on Friday or Saturday nights. Various church and other local groups vied for the privilege of holding an ice-cream social in conjunction with the weekly concert, that the nickels and dimes of the patrons might be collected for a worthy cause while they were entranced by the lively music. The summer programs of band music and ice-cream socials are still the pattern in Alma.

Other popular varieties of entertainment with the Alma folk prior to the age of the motor car, movie show, and radio program, were traveling stage plays featuring the old-fashioned melodrama, Summer Chautauqua programs, an occasional small circus, county and state agricultural fairs, and home-tale plays gotten up by any ambitious group of persons, young or old. The Alma people still love the home-talent show of any description.

Lodges or secret societies were always popular in Alma. The lodges which remained active for many years were the Masonic Order, the Modern Woodmen of America, the Odd Fellows, and the Elks, with the attendant women's auxiliary societies for each of those orders. There was also an active G. A. R. (Grand Army of the Republic) which had a large membership until past the turn of the century. At present, the only lodges which are still active in Alma are the Masonic and the Eastern Star. There are two service clubs, the Rotary and the Commercial Club, and there is also a Civic Improvement Club. The American Legion, with a membership representing the veterans of both World Wars, has supplanted the G. A. R.

The most important women's club in Alma is the Ladies' Reading Circle. It has been an active organization for 50 years, its members taking pride in its objectives of social service and cultural improvement.

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C. B. Thowe, Alma, Kansas, November 15, 1955.

Mrs. Beulah Weaver, Alma, Kansas, October 4, 1955.

Mrs. Amanda Winkler, Alma, Kansas, November 15, 1955.

Mrs. Bertha Wilson, Alma, Kansas, October 11, 1955.

APPENDIX

Table 1. Alma township census for the year 1860.¹

Head of family	:	:	:	Value	:	Number	:	Age; born
Other Adults	:	Age:	Nativity:	Property:	Occupation:	Children	:	in Kansas ²
Bader, Randolph	31	Baden	200	Farmer				
Brasche, August	40	Germany	800	M.D.				
Brunlow, J. H.	48	Ghio	100	Blacksmith	6			2 mo.
Mary	43	Ohio						
Clockman, John	44	Prussia	900	Farmer				
Mary L.	54	Prussia						
Copp, John	24	Germany	800	Farmer	2			2 yrs.
Mary J.	22	Germany						3 mo.
Dieball, Chris.	45	Prussia	1100	Farmer	6			2 yrs.
Henrietta	40	Prussia						
Dirker, Herman	37	Hanover	3000	Farmer				
Henrietta	45	Hanover						
Down, Peter	24	Germany	200	Farmer				
Mary	20	Germany						
Drebing, Wm.	44	Germany	1100	Farmer	2			8 mo.
Einter, Jacob	30	Germany		Laborer				
Felting, Adolph	27	Prussia	800	Farmer				
Fix, Michael	45	Penna.	1800	Farmer	10			1 yr.
Mary	43	Penna.						
Robert	23	Penna.						
Framm, Joseph	37	Germany	900	Farmer	3			6 mo.
Catherine	21	Hungary						
Freehoff, Charles	30	Germany		Carpenter				
Hannah	27	Germany						
Gleich, John P.	31	Germany	2000	Farmer	2			2 yrs.
Catherine	37	Germany						3 mo.
Grimm, Henry	30	Germany	450	Farmer				
Mary (widow)	54	Germany						
Grouse, John	30	Ireland	100	Farmer				
Gruffenstein, Wm.	31	Germany	400	Trader				
Haas, John	35	Germany	1000	Farmer	2			
Gertrude	30	Germany						
Hankammer, John	42	Germany		Farmer	2			
Christina	30	Germany						
Hankammer, Christ.	46	Germany	1700	Farmer	3			
Sabilla	46	Germany						
Hanson, Charles	30	Germany		Farmer	4			
Getie	23	Germany						
Hanson, Obey	50	Prussia		Farmer	4			
Catherine	43	Prussia						
Hebrank, I. P.	38	Germany	1400	Farmer	3			1 yr.
J---	37	Germany						
Hoheneck, E. ³	31	Germany	1500	Distiller				
Horne, Jake	83	Baden	160					

Table 1. (cont.)

Head of family	:	:	:	Value	:	Number	:	Age; born
Other Adults	:	Age:	Nativity:	Property:	Occupation:	Children	:	in Kansas
Horne, Wm.	27	Germany	1400	Farmer	1			9 mo.
Mary	25	Germany						
Housjak, B.		Prussia	800	Farmer				
Kayetta, Sam	26	Germany						
Mary	22	Germany						
Klein, Bertram	60	Germany	700	Farmer	2			
Catherine	55	Germany						
Kariach, Christ.	30	Prussia	700	Farmer				
Krapp, Edward	36	Germany	2000	Farmer	2			2 yrs.
Mary	30	Germany						
Krapp, John	32	Germany		Farmer	1			1 yr.
Mary	27	Germany						
Kratzer, Adam	25	Prussia		Farmer				
Kinsey, John ⁴	21	Germany		Farmer				
Helen (mother)	52	Germany						
Kinsley, Christ. ⁵		Germany		Farmer				
Marilina		Germany						
Kraus, Anthony	23	Hungary		Carpenter				
Matilda	20	Hungary						
Kraus, Morty	19	Hungary	600	Farmer				
Mary (mother)	35	Hungary			3			
Kreig, Henry	50	Germany	1100	Farmer	3			
Barbara	55	Illinois						
Kreig, Wm.	24	Germany		Farmer				
Laisch, Heinrich		Germany		Farm laborer				
Laisch, Henry		Germany		Farmer				
Lange, Wm.	40	Germany		Farmer	2			8 mo.
M---	32	Germany						
Limberg, Charles	42	Prussia	1000	Farmer	7			
Hannah	40	Prussia						
Litz, Philip	29	Germany		Farmer				
Lower, E. L.	38	Penna.	1800	Farmer	2			
Mary	39	Penna.						
Mahan, John T. (widower)	40	Penna.		Farmer	5			
Meier, Frank	34	Germany		Farmer				
Keseke, Herman	26	Prussia		Farmer				
Metsger, Elizabeth	41	France			6			2 yrs.
Peter (son)	19	France	900	Farmer				
Muehlenbacher, F.	25	Prussia	900	Farmer				
Muehlenbacher, J.	27	Prussia	1100	Farmer				
Muehlenbacher, P.	24	Prussia	900	Farmer				
Margaret, (mother)	60	Prussia	800					

Table 1. (cont.)

Head of family	Age	Nativity	Value	Occupation	Number	Age; born
Other Adults	Age	Nativity	Property	Occupation	Children	in Kansas
Mullen, H.	40	Prussia				
Catherine	28	Ohio				
Nehring, Chris.	25	Germany		Farmer		
Nehring, Gus	37	Germany	1600	Blacksmith	2	
Nehring, J. S.	31	Germany	100	Farmer		
Palenske, Fred	35	Prussia	1200	Farmer	4	4 yrs. ⁶
Caroline	26	Prussia				2 yrs. ⁷
Palenske, Henry	24	Prussia	800	Farmer		
Priviescht, O.	38	Hungary	800	Farmer		
Margaret	30	Hungary				
Rich, George	32	France	600	Farmer		
Saunders, George		England		Farmer		
Mary		England				
Schewe, Antone	39	Germany		Farmer		
Caroline	29	Switzerland				
Schindler, J.	40	France	300	Farmer		
Schmidt, Frank	35	Baden	1600	Farmer	1	
Lewena	38	Baden				
Schmitz, Henry	35	Germany	1200	Farmer		
Scholar, Bernard	38	Prussia	1200	Farmer		
Scholar, Henry	25	Prussia	900	Farmer		
Scholar, Joseph	28	Prussia	1200	Farmer		
Scholvier, John	39	Baden		Farmer	2	
Maria	32	Baden				
Schrouder, John	40	Germany	1000	Farmer	3	1 yr.
Anna	36	Germany				
Schwanke, Chris.	54	Germany	600	Farmer	10	2 yrs.
Eva	46	Germany				
Daniel	21	Germany				
Augusta	19	Germany				
Schwanke, J.	24	Germany	800	Farmer		
Chris, Andus	50	Germany	900	Farmer	9	9 mo.
Elizabeth	38	Germany				
Knoller, John		Illinois		Teamster		
Tricker, John	34	Prussia	1300	Farmer		
Manner, F.	30	Baden		Farmer	1	6 mo.
Frederica	23	Baden				
Frees, Joseph	32	Germany	2350	Farmer		
Frees, Peter	28	Germany	2400	Farmer & Merchant		
Fries, Andrew	36	Germany	1600	Farmer	4	
David	34	Germany				

Table 1. (concl.)

Head of family	Age	Nativity	Value	Occupation	Number	Age; born in Kansas
Thowe, Christ.		Germany	1000	Farmer		
Thowe, Peter	40	Germany		Farmer		
Walbinger	38	Bavaria				
Thowe, Andrew	36	Germany	1600	Farmer	4	
Davita	34	Germany				
Thowe, Christ.		Germany	1000	Farmer		
Thowe, Peter	40	Germany		Farmer		
Walbinger	38	Bavaria				
Thomas, Carl	34	Ireland	800	Farmer		
Trelowe, O. E.		Prussia		Carpenter		
Truffles, J. T.			200	Laborer		
Vall, John	24	Germany		Laborer		
Weber, August	28	Prussia	1300	Farmer	1	2 yrs.
Mary	28	Prussia				
Weiss, Joseph		Germany	1100	Farmer		
Wertzberger, A.	35	Germany		Farmer		
Mary	28	Prussia				
Wertzberger, O.	40	Germany	1000	Farmer	4	3 yrs.
Anna						1 yr.
Woland, Henry ⁸	40	Germany				
Gatherine	35	Germany				
Zwanziger, Gottlieb	38	Prussia	4800	Miller	3	9 mo.
Theresa	27	Bavaria		(and farmer)		
B. Hunch, servant		Germany				

¹Compiled from the 1860 Federal census of Alma Township, U. S. Census of 1860, Kansas, Vol. 5, pp. 273-180. On file at the Kansas Historical Society.

²The age shown in the extreme right hand column, indicates that the child of that age was born in Kansas.

³Hoheneck was usually written "Honske" in early accounts.

⁴ and ⁵Kinsley is the English spelling of the German name, "Keunzli."

⁶Kinsey is apparently an error in the spelling of "Kinsley."

⁷August Palenske, age 4 years, was the first white child born on Mill Creek. He was the son of Frederick Palenske.

⁸Louis Palenske, age 2 years, was also a son of Frederick Palenske.

⁹Woland is probably an error in spelling for "Volland."

PETITION FOR THE INCORPORATION OF ALMA

We the undersigned inhabitants of the townsite of Alma, (Kansas) said town site being situated on the land ... commonly described as the Northeast quarter of the Northwest quarter of Section Fifteen, Town twelve, range ten, east of the sixth principal meridian do petition and pray ... that we may be incorporated as a town and police be established for our local government and for the preservation and regulation of our local government and for the preservation and regulation of the commons appertaining to the said town site of Alma described as above set forth...do petition and pray that your Honor will order and declare said Town of Alma... an incorporated town.

Dated at Alma, Wabaunsee County, this 13th day of April, 1868.

Signatures:

Johannus Munch
Joseph Sehlichtkernd
Franz Gabbsky
Casper Simon
Joseph Simon
T. C. Simon

N. H. Whittemore
William Goetz
William Lang
J. N. Russ
S. R. Weed
John Winkler
Henry Schmitz

DECLARATION OF INCORPORATION OF ALMA

On petition being presented to me, Judge of the Probate Court in and for Wabaunsee County, State of Kansas, by two-thirds of the inhabitants of the townsite of Alma, praying that they may be incorporated as a town, and policy established for their local government, it is therefore ordered and declared by the authority vested in me as Probate Court in and for Wabaunsee County, and in accordance with the prayer of said petition, that the townsite of Alma... is hereby ordered and declared an incorporated Town, with all the rights and privileges of an incorporated town in such case by the Statutes made and provided; and do further order, constitute and appoint as Trustees of said Town, the following named persons:

John W. Winkler, Herman Dirker, Henry Schmitz, August Meyer, and Samuel R. Weed, the said Trustees to hold their office as such Trustees until their successors are elected and qualified as required by the Statutes in such case made and provided,

Given under my hand and seal this 13th day of April, 1868.

G. G. Hull
in and for Wabaunsee County,
State of Kansas.

Filed for Record, April 23, 1866 at 3:45 p.m.

ALMA: COMMUNITY, AND SHIRE TOWN OF WABAUNSEE COUNTY, KANSAS
ITS FIRST FIFTY YEARS, 1855-1905

by

LINMLE BAKER EDWARDS

B. S., Kansas State College
of Agriculture and Applied Science, 1953

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of History, Government, and Philosophy

KANSAS STATE COLLEGE
OF AGRICULTURE AND APPLIED SCIENCE

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The purpose of this study is to present the events which effected developments in the first fifty years in the life of a small Kansas community in a remote agricultural region of mid-America, covering the period from 1855 to 1905. The events set forth center around the settlement of the Mill Creek valley, in the heart of Wabaunsee County, the development of this community as the early Alma Township, the founding of the town of Alma with its early developments, and the subsequent events concerning the town's affairs to 1905. The events presented are shown in their economic, social, cultural and spiritual aspects in relation to the town and community.

The geographic setting of the Alma community, which the writer feels played a significant role in the early developments in the lives of the settlers, as well as dictating that the town of Alma would remain more rural than urban in character, is described in the introduction, with a map of early Wabaunsee County included for clarification. Chapter I accounts for the settlement of the upper Mill Creek region of Wabaunsee County, and presents the first five-year period in the lives of its settlers, with the hardships, setbacks, and successes attendant upon carving their farms from the American wilderness. The old world background of most of the Mill Creek settlers was German, which lends a distinctive character to the Alma community. The events of revolution and the aspects of economic distress, which caused many thousands of German people to immigrate to the United States in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, are briefly described. Since the events attendant upon the opening and settlement of the Kansas Territory played an important part in bringing German settlers to Kansas, an account of these events is also included. Joseph and Peter Thoes were among the first of the German settlers and they acted as guides for most of the settlers who

came to this region in 1856. Gottlieb Zwanziger, an educated German who was trained as a topographical engineer, came to Mill Creek in 1857, soon occupying a leading place in the affairs of the community.

Chapter II presents an account of the establishment of Wabauensee County and its early townships, showing especially, the developments in the early Alma Township, prior to the founding of the town of Alma. Chapter III is concerned with the founding of the town of Alma and the important developments in the life of the town during its early period from 1866 to 1880. Henry Schmitz, one of the young Germans who settled on Mill Creek in 1856, took the initiative in founding the town of Alma, which came into being with the primary purpose of becoming the "capital" or county seat of Wabauensee County, in 1866. Alma had to win three elections before the permanent location of the county seat was finally settled. The last county seat contest came in 1871, with Alma winning. Practically every town and would-be town in the county entered the contest, making offers of gifts of new court houses to the voters. Alma offered a fine building of considerable dimensions and stone construction, which was to become the permanent property of the county on condition that the county seat not be removed from Alma for a period of 21 years.

Chapter IV describes the important events in Alma during the period from 1880 to 1895. The coming of Alma's first railroad, although only a branch line, brought new settlers to the town and aided the business affairs of the town to prosper. The obtaining of the main line of the Rock Island, in 1887, greatly accelerated the growth of the town but it was not the chief agent in causing Alma's boom of the late 1880's to become a giant and glittering bubble of brief prosperity. Alma's inflated boom and the sad state in which the

town found its financial affairs when the bubble had burst, were due, for the most part, to an overambitious attempt to develop a coal mining industry for Alma and to the incautious and improper handling of city funds. Whether the leader of the mining venture and owner of the mining operations, John F. Limerick, who also was Alma's mayor and leading banker during this period, was a villain of the first magnitude or merely the victim of unfortunate circumstances is still a subject for debate among the elder citizens of Alma. Limerick was unable to complete the venture of sinking a deep shaft when his funds were depleted. With the cessation of the mining venture and the failure of the Limerick bank, Alma's boom became a bitter memory. The remainder of Chapter IV concerns the efforts of the town to make a recovery from the period of depression which followed the boom and to devise some satisfactory means of meeting the insistent demands of its creditors without imposing an intolerable tax burden upon its citizens. This painful period dragged on until the turn of the century when the whole country entered a more prosperous period. Alma, at the close of 1905, had entered a period of moderate prosperity and was now content to remain a small Kansas city of the third class, serving as a trade center and the "shire town" of Wabaunsee County.

Chapter V completes the story of the first half century of the Alma community with a discussion of the educational, spiritual, and cultural aspects which were, and still are, important in the lives of its people.

This study is based upon local and county records of Wabaunsee County. Extensive use was also made of county newspapers. Personal interviews were held and the census records on file in the Kansas State Historical Society were consulted.